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THE ART OF
WOOD-ENGRAVING
IN ITALY

IN THE

FIFTEENTH CENTURY

BY

FRIEDRICH LIPPMANN
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PREFACE

The book now offered to the consideration of English readers has developed out of a series of articles which appeared originally in the "Jahrbuch der K. Preussischen Kunstsammlungen", and were afterwards published in a separate issue of a hundred copies. The growing interest in all branches of old Italian art among English readers on both sides of the Atlantic, has induced me to revise and improve the substance of those articles, and to publish it in an English form. The text is not only corrected, but is also considerably enlarged; and the number of illustrations is proportionately augmented. The work may therefore be regarded as in some degree a new one. For the attainment of this result, I have to express my thanks to Mr. Bernard Quaritch, whose ready co-operation was a stimulus to the exertion of preparing my labours for the press; and to another friendly collaborator whose aid was cordially afforded in the task of converting the book from a German into an English one.

THE AUTHOR.

Berlin; March, 1888.

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ITALIAN WOOD-ENGRAVING IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The art of engraving, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, occupied in Italy a very different position from that which it held on this side of the Alps. When Typography was invented, about the middle of the former century, Wood-engraving had long been practised in Germany as a method of multiplying bible-pictures for the people. Its application was not confined to sacred subjects only; incidents of every-day life were illustrated likewise, and a ready vehicle was furnished for the dissemination of lampoon and caricature. In this art, which had become so familiar to the popular mind, and which was indeed one of the chief means of conveying religious instruction to the multitude, the new craft of book-printing found a useful helpmate.

The maxim that "pictures are the books of the illiterate" is one that we find repeated in many varying forms of expression by the preachers and theologians of Germany and the Low Countries. Amongst "the Brothers of Common Life", at Agnetenberg near Zwolle, the production of such pictures or prints of scriptural subjects, was the chief aim of their missionary zeal for the spread of Christian knowledge. The coloured woodcuts so dear to the people of the North, became in the end one of the most potent agencies of the movement for Reform, and were, even in the second half of the sixteenth century, recognised as such by the leaders of the Protestant cause.

In Italy, on the contrary, there were apparently no popular woodcuts in the earlier part of the fifteenth century; and the cheap pictures of saints, clumsily incised, badly printed, and coarsely coloured, which were sold in large numbers at all the fairs and church-doors in Germany, had no currency in the peninsula. Not till about the year 1500 do we find that there existed any such class or corporation as the Briefdrucker and Briefmaler[1] of Germany, with whom the manufacture of popular prints was a regular business. Even after that date the trade was of essentially different character in each country. Italy cannot claim to have produced a single example of Xylography in the fifteenth century; indeed we know altogether of but one Italian book of the kind, which appeared at Venice in the early part of the sixteenth. It is curious to contrast this state of things with the extensive circulation in Germany and the Netherlands of various blockbooks, which, in their many editions, formed an almost complete course of popular literature, and were already very considerable in number before the date of Gutenberg's invention.

The cause of this remarkable fact in the history of progress, was assuredly something more than the deficiency among Italians of a technical knowledge of wood-engraving. The true reason is rather that the grand frescoes of their painters had familiarised them with bolder and more vivid conceptions of the sacred story than those to which the Northern mind was accustomed; and also that the pious sentiment which prompted the desire of the German to decorate his home with a saint's picture, had no existence in Italy. Here, likewise, the strong religious movement which awoke in Germany before the Reformation, and which led to the increased multiplication of such pictures, was wholly unknown. When however a kindred spiritual enthusiasm seized upon the minds of the Italian populace, — as, for instance, when Savonarola was preaching in Florence during the last decade of the fifteenth century, — the same artistic method of illustration came at once into existence, lending effectual aid to the exhortations of the preacher. Decorated with woodcuts, the printed sermons of the

[1] Card-printers, card-painters.

Ferrarese monk spread rapidly among the people, in thousands of copies, and in numberless editions.

The production of separate prints was not, in Italy, a manufacture pursued in accordance with a regular and permanent demand, but rather an exceptional operation intended to supply a special need at particular occasions. Even the few examples which remain are manifestly the work of able artists, deficient sometimes it may be in technical skill; and evince for the most part a distinct relation to the contemporary developments of the art of Painting. On the other hand, there is a decided absence in Italy of great masters like Wolgemuth and Dürer, who treated wood-engraving as an essential portion of their artistic function.

At the time when printing was introduced into Italy, the art of the calligrapher and book-miniator had reached mature perfection; and it still continued to flourish for a long time, in spite of the ever growing and developing activity of the press. But, even in the very nature of its application and use, the illumination of manuscripts in Italy was different from that which prevailed in Germany. While, in the North, the drawings in manuscripts were especially intended to serve as pictorial aids to the interpretation and elucidation of the text, or at least to gratify the innocent delight of the people in rude pictures slightly dashed with colour; in Italy on the contrary, they were destined to satisfy the requirements of a cultivated, frequently a highly refined, taste. It is true indeed that many manuscripts executed in the Low Countries, and even in Upper-Germany, were adorned with miniatures of admirable delicacy and finish; but these were intended for personages of wealth and distinction. Side by side with them, we find that an enormous manufacture of coarsely illustrated manuscripts on paper, of low value, was prevalent in Germany towards the close of the Middle Ages. While therefore it was relatively easy for Typography to assume at once its rightful place in the latter country, in the peninsula it was otherwise. The Italian printers had to sustain the rivalry of the splendidly illuminated manuscripts, which they could only overcome by strenuous endeavours to embellish the pages of their books with equally attractive decorations. The general characteristic difference be-

tween German and Italian illustrative work, might be defined by stating that it was developed in Germany from a mere love of pictures, as a sort of dramatic commentary upon the text which they accompanied; and in Italy from the desire for beautifying books, as well as everything else, with decorative graces. In Germany, the proper function of book-illustration was instruction; in Italy, ornament.

We know how strong and decided was the aversion expressed by many men who clung to the good old ways, against the books *che si fanno in forma.* The mechanical crudeness of such printed volumes, all so rigorously uniform, seemed repulsive by contrast with the vellum manuscripts, written in fine and slender Roman letters, and displaying in their graceful miniatures the charm of refined and individualised art-work. It was certainly impossible for the mere typographer to attain at once to the beauty of written books. The one advantage which his productions could claim over those of the calligrapher, was their cheapness — a merit which was the constant, but also the only, theme dwelt upon by the eulogists of printing. Nevertheless, the irresistible power of the new invention soon made such way that the struggle against taste and old custom was maintained with ease by the typographers; while, on the part of the hand-workers, the visible decline of their art was deplored with hopeless resignation.

The very skill and artistic ability of the Italian book-copyists reacted with an extremely favorable influence upon the development of printing. The foreign craftsmen who settled in Italy, studied above all things to meet and satisfy the requirements of book-buyers. They made no attempt to transplant southwards their homely Gothic letters, but devised a round Latin type as nearly akin as possible to the customary character of Italian manuscripts. In the first extant book printed at Subiaco — the Lactantius of 1465[1] — Sweynheim and Pannartz began their typo-

[1] The claim made by the late Mr. Klemm of Dresden to have the first place given to the Subiaco Cicero, and only the second to the Lactantius, has not been borne out by investigation. The inscription on which he relied does not appear to be genuine.

graphical career with a fount of Roman letters. It betrays indeed some slight admixture of Gothic form, but no such tendency is observable in the purely Roman types used at Venice by the brothers Johann and Windelin of Speyer in 1469-1470. In the latter year Nicolas Jenson began to produce books at Venice with a type of matchless beauty, in which the Roman characters may be said to have attained their classical perfection; unequalled even by the most renowned masters of typography who have followed him.

One of the most striking and curious phenomena in the history of modern Painting, a circumstance which excites our wonder in the works of the Van Eycks — namely, the consummate technical skill displayed by the first great masters and never achieved in equal measure by any of their successors, — is also remarkable in the history of Printing. The Psalter produced by Fust and Schoeffer in 1457 is a typographical monument well-nigh unique in its magnificence and perfection, which has since remained unexcelled in or out of Germany. A similar fact is observable in Italy, where, after the days of Jenson, there was not only no technical advance in the art of printing, but on the contrary a gradual decay in taste and elegance. It is no less true in all branches of art, that men of original ideas who have carefully worked them out in the light of patient personal experience, and thus succeeded in the invention and practice of new methods, always stamp their efforts with a seal of genuine perfection; while those who come later and simply carry out a system established by their predecessors, never rise to the same standard.

Arduous as it was already for the Italian printers to attempt to vie, by means of type and press, with the work of the calligraphers, they could have no hope whatever of producing from their own resources anything to be compared with the splendour of the miniatures painted by such men as Antonio di Monza or Gherardo. It was only by a slow and tedious growth that wood-engraving could attain to the power of artistic expression; and even when that stage had been reached, the application of the art to the adornment of books would necessarily be carried out upon principles quite different from those which guided the mi-

niaturist. As soon, however, as its intrinsic value was recognised, the Italian designers and wood-engravers developed a style of their own, which was, at least during the fifteenth century, essentially unlike that of the Germans.

If we survey the productions of wood-engraving in Italy in the fifteenth century, we find three groups of more or less distinctive character. That which is numerically the smallest, comprises the illustrations which issued from the early printing-presses in Rome or Naples, executed by or for the German craftsmen who introduced typography. A second group, no less clearly defined, is formed by woodcuts of Florentine origin which appeared during the short period between 1490 and 1508, marked by a certain grace and charm peculiarly their own. The third group, the largest and most varied in its range, is constituted by the works of artists in Northern Italy. This group derived its characteristic type from the influence of the Venetian and the Mantegnesque school of painting; and its practice, especially in Venice, developed a high degree of technical and artistic excellence. That consummation was assured, but not entirely achieved, within the limits of the Quattrocento period, and it is in the sixteenth century that we find the matured perfection of Venetian wood-engraving. The subject of the present treatise is however confined to the Quattrocento phases of the art, and we shall not deal with its later accomplishment.

The different groups above referred to were contemporaneous in their growth, but we must for the sake of clearness review them separately and take each one by itself.

The connexion between the art of wood-engraving in Italy and the labours of the contemporary schools of painting, can be traced only in the larger and more prominent features of each; the peculiar characteristics of the painter's work are very seldom visible in that of the man who produced woodcuts. Metal-engravings are distinguished from the latter, in exhibiting a clearer and more immediate relation to the local type of pictorial art.

Here a pertinent question arises — who were the designers of the woodcuts, and to what class of artists did they belong? It is not to be resolved by any information we possess, or any

indication afforded by the works themselves. The great masters and leaders of Painting had apparently as little to do with the drawing of designs for woodcuts as with the execution of miniatures in manuscripts. Monograms or marks that can be interpreted with certainty are of the very rarest occurrence, and it is hardly possible in a single instance to discover a particular designer's hand in the woodcuts themselves. Like the miniatures in manuscripts, the wood-engravings of the fifteenth century are for the most part anonymous works. We are aware that book-illumination was practised by a distinct class of artists devoted exclusively or chiefly to that branch of decoration; and we may plausibly conjecture that the vocation of the wood-engraver was similarly specialised. In each we find a certain average standard of merit, and a certain affinity in the relation which they severally exhibit to the contemporary development of the art of Painting.

Many of the woodcut-designers have a distinctly individualised style of their own, and we can frequently trace their activity through a lengthened period in the books published at any one given place during successive years. Those men seem to have been professionally, or almost professionally, engaged in the production of drawings for the wood-engraver. We find them at work in Florence between 1490 and 1508, and during a longer space of time in Venice. Side by side with engravings of the kind produced by those professional designers, we meet also with works of a different character which usually make their appearance once only, or at least never twice in the same form. These were probably designed by artists who undertook an occasional commission from one particular printer. Such was certainly the case with the few single-leaf woodcuts of Italian origin which have come down to us from the fifteenth century, — nearly all anonymous, as already stated. It is conceivable, and by no means unlikely, that many of the miniaturists whose regular profession had been extinguished by the printing-press, may have applied their talent to the production of designs for the woodblock.

In forming a judgment upon the artistic value of woodcuts, we must remember that they are of complex origin, and cannot be regarded as the work of their designer alone. In the case of

paintings, and even of metal-engravings, it is different; but of woodcuts it should be observed that the craftsman who cuts the drawing upon the block is almost equally responsible with the designer for the quality of the result. During the initial stages of the art, a single person may have combined the two functions, executing as well as creating the design; but it was assuredly not long before a division of the labour was effected. The process of designing and drawing a composition is so utterly dissimilar from that of cutting it out upon the woodblock, that no one hand would have continued to unite them for any length of time. Each operation required a wholly different kind of technical skill; and as soon as the demand for production became enlarged, the separation of designer and wood-engraver into two distinct classes took place as a matter of course. By this arrangement, all the details of the execution were left to the mechanical craftsman, even in those instances in which the artist drew his sketch at once upon the block. The disparity in education and artistic training between the designer and the workman whose dexterity in the use of the knife was his only merit, was usually very great, and of course almost always to the disadvantage of the latter. It cannot be doubted that many woodcuts which we look upon as poor and commonplace work, were rendered from excellent designs, but spoiled by the ineptitude of the engraver. We should not forget that the blockcutter enjoyed at that time a much greater independence in relation to the designer than is the case nowadays; and that he often modified the character of the illustration, without scruple, and in accordance with his own ideas. It would indeed have been inconsistent with the spirit of that age for an artist or art-workman to reproduce exactly all the unimportant features of his model. Designs by men of widely different characteristics were frequently made to assume a general artistic resemblance, under the levelling influence of the woodcutter's hand; and the busy ateliers which turned out large quantities of woodcuts, produced among their workmen such a uniformity of style that we find, for instance, Zoan Andrea's studio in Venice stamping its own peculiar impress upon the productions of a whole school and epoch of art.

Sweynheim and Pannartz, the prototypographers of Italy, in the Subiaco Lactantius of 1465, made use of wood-engraving for the purpose of decorating the first page with an ornamental border. It is a simple linear design shewing white interlacements on a black ground; and was evidently borrowed from a mediæval manuscript.

Of the employment of woodcuts for pictorial illustration, the earliest instance known to us is found in a book published at Rome in 1467 — the *Meditationes* of Cardinal Torquemada (then usually styled "de Turrecremata[1]"). It was printed by Ulrich Hahn, a German, who describes himself as a citizen of Vienna, born at Ingolstadt *(ex Ingolstat, civis Viennensis)*. He had established his press at Rome in 1467, and the first fruit of his labour was the "Meditationes".

Thirty three of the numerous woodcuts in that volume occupy each half a page of small folio size; one of them fills an entire page. Some lines of introductory matter inform us that the illustrations — compositions of subjects from the Old and New Testament — were intended to be reproductions of certain frescoes (now no longer in existence) which had been painted by order of the Cardinal on the walls of some portion of the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva[2]. The true nature of the connexion between the frescoes and the woodcuts must remain unknown to us; but there is, for certain, little or no trace in the latter of any style distinctive of the local and contemporary school of painting. The manner of their execution is thoroughly Germanic. In their coarse outlines, and the angular and awkward rendering of the faces, they evince the utter incapability of the engraver to deal with the finer elements of the design; and in this respect Hahn's woodcuts are precisely similar to the early illustrative efforts of

[1] The intitulation runs thus — "Meditationes reverendissimi patris domini Johannis de Turrecremata . . . posite et depicte de ipsius mandato in ecclesie ambitu Sancte marie de minerva Rome".

[2] Hain, No. 15722. Here, as in subsequent instances, the reference is made to Hain's *Repertorium Bibliographicum, Stuttgart* 1826-28, 4 volumes 8vo; in which the full and correct titles of the works cited will be found.

Sorg and Baemler at Augsburg. There can be little doubt that those lines were drawn by German hands; probably Ulrich Hahn himself was the engraver.

We know as a fact that the early printers were under the necessity of constructing and preparing for themselves all the apparatus required in the exercise of their craft; it could hardly, indeed, be otherwise, so long as the art was a new one. Even the cutting and casting of the types were portion of their own functions. In Germany, of course, the aid of the guild of *Briefdrucker* and *Briefmaler* might have been procured for the purpose of illustrating books with woodcuts; — not so in Italy, where the practice of wood-engraving seems to have had no existence, or at least not to have been employed, before the introduction of printing. Sweynheim and Pannartz, as the first typographers in Italy, were naturally, before they began to work the press, obliged to devise and create their types. Those which they needed, being of Latin form, were not procurable from the North where only the German Gothic was then in vogue. That Sweynheim understood the use of the graver and its application, we have irrefragable proof in the Ptolemy of 1478, the engraved maps in which were begun, if not finished, by him. We are also assured, on good authority, that Nicolas Jenson was a coin-engraver in the French royal mint before he became a typographer. Even Ulrich Hahn, although far inferior to those two men in skill and ability, must have invented the types which he used, before he began to print the "Meditationes". The preparation of the woodcuts with which it is illustrated, must also have been a part of his labour. It is quite certain that he could not find in Rome any one competent to execute such work; and the only possible alternative is, that he might have brought with him from Germany some journeyman acquainted with wood-engraving. A circumstance which appears to fortify the conjecture that he was himself the artist of the "Meditationes", is the fact that no other book illustrated with woodcuts issued from his press. We may infer that he was unable, from the growth of his business and the increased demands upon his resources, to spare sufficient time for the practice of an art so tedious and laborious as that of wood-engraving. In any case, the

woodcuts of the Torquemada were the products of German workmanship transplanted to Italian soil.

The spirit of Italian taste by which the early German typographers in Italy were led to form their letters on Latin models, is also visible in the composition of the woodcuts engraved by them, however imperceptible to the workmen themselves. If we compare the Turrecremata illustrations with German engravings of the same kind, and representing a similar stage of artistic development, we must recognise in Ulrich Hahn's work, notwithstanding its coarse and tasteless execution, the merit of a definite and well-balanced composition. To this extent, at least, the models which he followed seem to have favorably influenced his labours, even if the woodcuts be, as they appear, nothing more than detached *motifs* from the frescoes which they profess to reproduce.

The engravings of the first edition of the "Meditationes" reappear in the second and third likewise; the one published by Ulrich Hahn in 1473 in combination with his partner Simon de Luca, the other in 1478 by himself alone. In 1479, an edition of the same work, with a totally different set of woodcuts, was produced at Foligno by Johann Numeister. To these we shall recur in the sequel.

It would not seem that the wood-engravers in Rome contrived very soon to rise above the low level of their primitive mechanical art. Several editions were published there between 1470 and 1480, and even later, of the *Mirabilia Romæ*, a little guide-book for pilgrims wishing to visit the holy places of the city. The cuts in it are rude and coarse, but suitably adapted to the popular chapbook in which they occur. Stephan Planck, Eucharius Silber, and others, printed the "Mirabilia" in succession: and there is one edition, probably produced in Germany, which is wholly xylographic. They are all devoid of artistic merit.

In the year 1481, two new German printers, Sixtus[1] and Gregorius, made their appearance in Rome, and produced books

[1] Sixtus Riessinger, who had given up his press in Naples, and remained for two or three years in Rome on his journey homeward to Germany.

with woodcuts; but these imitators of Ulrich Hahn developed no higher technical skill than their precursor. The *Chiromantia*, which they published in that year, resembles a number of other fifteenth-century books on the same topic, in its many woodcuts exhibiting the various forms of the palm of the hand; but these stiff and conventional diagrams do not belong to our subject. We may however conjecture that the presence of those two Germans, technically acquainted with the process of the art, and competent to lend their aid to book-illustration, had something to do with the fact that certain volumes thus adorned were brought out in Rome between 1481 and 1483.

Amongst the chief promoters of the new art of Typography, was Joannes Philippus de Lignamine, a physician who had achieved distinction in various branches of literature, and one of the most intimate friends of Cardinal Francesco della Rovere (afterwards Pope Sixtus IV). He set up a press in Rome, and worked at it himself, rather as an enthusiastic dilettante than for the purpose of gain. His own words are — "sumsi laborem hujusmodi et industriam non illaudabilem apud me neque apud posteros inutilem ut mea opera atque ingenio libri elegantes imprimerentur".[1] Besides directing his efforts to the procurement of a handsomer and more tasteful Latin type than had yet been employed in Rome, Lignamine also conceived the idea of sending out his books — mostly of small size and extent — decorated with woodcuts. It must be avowed that his success in this line was not very great. A small quarto volume which he published in 1481, containing the opuscula of Philippus de Barberiis[2], exhibits twenty four figures of prophets and sibyls, each occupying a full page. Although angular in manner, and coarse in their outlines, they were evidently designed by an Italian artist of no mean ability. Inferior even to those productions are the woodcuts of plants which we find in the *Herbarium Apuleii Platonici* (also printed by Lignamine),[3] and which, on account of their thick lines, have been

[1] Preface to *Opuscula Philippi de Barberiis.* Cf. Audifredi, Specimina editionum Romanarum Sæc. XV, p. 112.

[2] Hain, No. 2455.

[3] Hain, No. 1322.

regarded as metal-engravings.[1] The book is undated, but the period of its publication is revealed by the dedication to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, who died in 1483. Lignamine does not appear to have been satisfied with the poor result of those attempts to beautify his books with woodcuts. In another edition, dateless but manifestly later than that of 1481, of the *Opuscula Philippi de Barberiis,* he contrived to secure the services of engravers possessing a far superior degree of skill.[2] Here we find the figures of prophets and sibyls well drawn, well proportioned, and framed within architectonic borders in the fully developed style of the Renaissance. The character of the work leads us to ascribe these designs to some artist of the school of Ghirlandajo.

The latest woodcut-book produced at Rome during the period of which we are treating is the *Priscorum Heroum Stemmata,* a small work by Thomas Ochsenbrunner, a German monk.[3] It dates from 1494, and is a sort of compendious Roman history arranged in short biographies of the chief men of each successive epoch. The pages are decorated with borders, daintily drawn and finely executed, in which figures of animals are placed amid intertwining wreaths and foliage, with scrolls bearing inscriptions, — all in pure Gothic manner; and each separate biography is preceded by a fanciful portrait of its hero, arrayed in mediaeval knightly costume. The work is so thoroughly Gothic in style, and bears the stamp of German art so unmistakeably, that, if the evidence of the colophon were absent, we should not have hesitated to assign the book to a Mentz or Strassburg press, rather than a Roman one. Not only the author, but the printers also (Johannes Besicken and Sigismund Mayr) were German; and it was undoubtedly by immigrated artists of the same race that the illustrations were designed and engraved.

Before we turn our attention from the sporadic and occasional practice of wood-engraving in Rome, to its more developed cul-

[1] Cf. Weigel, Die Anfänge der Druckerkunst, I, No. 63. Lippmann, Die Anfänge der Formschneidekunst (in the Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft, I, p. 230).

[2] Hain, No. 2453.

[3] Hain, No. 11 934.

tivation in the cities of Northern Italy, we must take cognizance of a curious and isolated phase of Italo-Teutonic art which meets us in Naples between 1480 and 1490.

Francesco Tuppo, a jurist remarkable for his extreme literary activity — the official "Regis Ferdinandi scriba" as he describes himself — took a leading part in the promotion of the art of printing in Naples. When, in 1481, Sixtus Riessinger quitted that city, — in which he had exercised the profession of typographer for ten years, — Tuppo seems to have taken up his business and carried it on more extensively. He is no where indicated as an actual working printer, and his position corresponded probably with that held nowadays by the head of a printing-firm. Of the productions of his press, only one is interesting in connexion with the subject now in hand. This is an edition of the so-called Fables of Æsop, which he published in 1485.[1] His version of these fables is, as he himself describes it in the colophon, "materno sermone fidelissima", but it is accompanied by a quantity of diffuse moral and political disquisitions. The work is a fine example of typography, printed in folio size and adorned with eighty seven large woodcuts, of which twenty three illustrate the preliminary life of the fabulist, and the other sixty four are given to the apologues. These engravings are marked by strong individuality of treatment. The figures, especially those of the animals, are powerfully drawn, their attitudes and movements lifelike; and the human heads are massive, with a striking and energetic expressiveness in the features. The outlines are firm and sharp; there is considerable mastery of perspective in the disposition and the graded shading of the backgrounds. We find, in the general aspect of these Aesop woodcuts, something which reminds us of the earliest productions of copper-engraving in Germany. Every one of the designs is surrounded by a rich border composed of separate pieces of frame-work which are frequently repeated in various combinations. The upper portion in each is an arch filled in with ornamental details in white upon a black ground, somewhat Saracenic in style, and enclosing representations of the triumphs

[1] Hain, No. 353.

of Hercules executed with remarkable power. The first leaf of the part comprising the fables is decorated with a border of that kind, occupying the full size of the page, in which figures of angels appear floating within festoons of intertwining foliage.[1]

The peculiar foreign look of those illustrations, and especially of the decorative borders, appears to result from the mixture of diverse artistic elements. The miniatures of an old illuminated manuscript, probably one of Sicilian origin, may have furnished a model adapted and worked out in their own fashion by German designers and wood-engravers then resident in Naples. There is no affinity whatever between the Æsop illustrations and the woodcuts which appear in any other Italian book of that period. Their execution reminds us rather of the Strassburg school of wood-engraving; while a certain coarseness in the rendering of the faces, and the peculiar waviness of outline which marks the drawing of the bodies and limbs, especially in the designs of the Life of Æsop, recall the German school of copper-engraving which is usually treated as a single group under the name of the master "E. S. 1466". Technically considered, those woodcuts hold a position of commanding importance amongst the works of their epoch. The lines are clear and firm, and there is no trace of the uncouthness which usually disfigured wood-engraving before the last decade of the fifteenth century.

From the illustrations in Tuppo's Æsop, only one conclusion can be deduced; namely, that they are the work of a German artist who had had some training in the Strassburg school. This is all the more likely, as there was no lack in Naples at that time of German workmen connected with typography. In the period between 1475 and 1491, Matthias of Olmütz (Matthias Moravus de Olomuntz) was busily occupied in that city as a printer of skill and eminence. He made use of a new and elegant fount of plain Roman letters for setting up his books, but we observe that he frequently embellished them with decorative initials. Many biblio-

[1] This ornamental border is likewise found in the Hebrew Bible printed by or for the Soncino editors at Naples in 1488. A facsimile of it is given by Mr. R. Fisher in "A Catalogue of Engravings etc." London, 1879. 8vo.

graphers have assumed that Tuppo's Æsop was a product of the press of Matthias Moravus. According to a conjecture, of which we merely take notice here without desiring to attach any weight to it, Matthias may have been in some way related to his countryman, the engraver Wenzel of Olmütz, — a man whose work shows distinct traces of Schongauer's influence; and had perhaps acquired his artistic training in the same school. We lack however all the necessary groundwork of ascertained facts on which to base an assumption of that sort; for we do not even know whether Matthias was actually the printer of Tuppo's Æsop. That he was engaged in the pursuit of his art in Naples at the time of its appearance is all that we can avouch with certainty.

Tuppo's Æsop seems to have won some popularity as an illustrated book. We may at least infer so much from the fact that a reprint appeared at Aquila (di Napoli) in 1493[1], with woodcuts which are full-sized copies of those in the original. They are carefully done and evince some technical skill and experience, chiefly in the border-work; but, of the fine sharp touch that marks the original designs, there is little trace.

The Æsop is, indeed, not the first Neapolitan book with woodcuts. An edition had appeared in 1480, in that city, of the "Musices Theoria" of Francesco Gafori;[2] — printed by Francesco di Dino, a Florentine — in which, on the reverse of folio 18, there is a woodcut representing the mythological invention of Music, by a design of five men striking upon an anvil. The block was cut by an unskilful hand, in outlines with a slight hatching at the edges to indicate shading; and the appearance of the woodcut, in so far as its coarseness can be said to betray any style of art whatever, is that of very bad German work.

[1] Hain, 355. Printed by "Eusanius de Stella, civis Aquilanus", as he styles himself in the colophon.

[2] Hain, 7404.



From Tuppo's Aesop, Naples 1485. The fable of the Hydra and the frogs.

From the year 1490 onwards, the art of wood-engraving acquired a fresh and special development in Florence. The number of its productions is indeed small, and we have no reason to suppose that their excellence is due to an immediate connexion with any of the great painters then flourishing in the city on the Arno. So far as our knowledge extends, those masters never furnished designs to the block-cutter; but the potent influence of the Florentine school was deeply felt in all branches of contemporary art. To its inspiration we may attribute the growth of an independent style amongst the wood-engravers, and the production by them of a series of very charming works.

In their characteristic features, the Florentine woodcuts are markedly distinct, not only from the works of the primitive Italo-German artists which we have already considered, but also from those of the Venetian and North-Italian group. Illustrations in books form the major part of the class that we have now to review, at least of the works which we can with certainty ascribe to a Florentine origin. They are, nearly always, small engravings of the character of vignettes, in which the design, boldly and firmly cut, is usually in outline, with dense masses of shadow obtained principally by leaving portions of the surface of the block untouched so as yield broad depths of blackness in the impression. In these dark parts, the details of the ground and the distance are cut out in white, in the style of the dotted prints (Schrotblätter, gravures en manière criblée) — a technical method by which an extremely powerful effect can be produced. Nowhere else than in Florence do we find that such a mode of treatment was adopted; and the conclusion to be drawn from that fact indicates the existence of a Florentine atelier to which the process peculiarly belonged and out of which it found no wider acceptance. The comparative fewness of the Florentine woodcuts renders it probable that only a small number of workshops were engaged in their production. Until about 1491 there must have been a deficiency of artists capable of performing such work according to the idea and the taste of the publishers; notwithstanding that the need of furnishing books with illustrations was undoubtedly experienced before that time.

The art of Printing was introduced at Florence in 1471 by Bernardo Cennini, a metal-worker, who had previously been Ghiberti's assistant. Considerably more than a hundred books (— the exact number of the dated ones known to us is 110) were produced in the period between that year and 1490; but none of them seems to have been illustrated with woodcuts. The evident reason is that no one was acquainted with the practice of the art; for, in the occasional instances of book-illustration at Florence during that time, we find that recourse was had to the difficult and tedious process of engraving copper-plates and then working them separately on the sheets of letter-press as soon as these were prepared by the typographer. It was then, as it is to-day, a complicated business, requiring that each sheet should pass twice through the press, in the two distinct operations of plate and type-printing. The engravings in the *Monte Santo di Dio*, the first Florentine book in which illustrations appear, were thus produced. It was printed in 1477 by a German, Nicolaus Lorenz, who styled himself variously as Nicolo Tedesco or Nicolo di Lorenzo. In the colophon of another book from his press, he is described as having been born within the diocese of Breslau ("Impressum est hoc opus per me Nicholam Diœcesis Vratislaviensis"). The "Monte Santo di Dio"[1] contains three copper-engravings printed within the text; two of them being so large in size as to cover each a full page. They have been ascribed to Baccio Baldini. A few years later, Nicolaus Lorenz set about the accomplishment of a much greater undertaking of similar kind; namely, an edition of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, with the commentary of Cristoforo Landino, to be illustrated with copper-plate engravings. This work, completed and published in 1481 in a large folio volume, was intended to comprise as many engravings as there were cantos in the poem; and, in the setting of the type, a space was left open for that purpose at the beginning of each of the hundred sections. The engraver did not however proceed beyond the eighteenth canto of the *Inferno*.

[1] Hain, 1276. It is a work of mystic and allegorical character, written by Antonio Bettini da Siena, Bishop of Foligno, who died in 1478.

Those eighteen engravings have been assigned to Sandro Botticelli and Baccio Baldini, on the faith of two passages in Vasari; one in his life of Marc' Antonio (Vasari, Sansoni Edition, V, p. 396), the other in his account of Botticelli (ibid. III, p. 317). With reference to Baldini, he remarks that "everything which he did was designed and drawn by Botticelli". The recent recovery of a grand illuminated manuscript of the Divina Commedia, containing the drawings from Botticelli's own hand, with which he illustrated the poem of the great Florentine, has enlightened us with regard to the true connexion between those designs and the engravings in the 1481 edition. (— The manuscript is now, as every one knows, in the Berlin Museum, having been acquired from the Duke of Hamilton's collection; but eight of the drawings which originally formed portion of it have lately been discovered in the library of the Vatican. —) The eighteen engravings in the 1481 Dante are now ascertained, by the infallible text of comparison, to be reduced copies, or rather brief transcripts, from Botticelli's designs. The man who produced them was a somewhat indifferent artist, who exerted his rather dull ingenuity in selecting from Botticelli's rich compositions the main or leading action in each, and compressing them into pictures of minute size. He had moreover but little skill in drawing; and his lack of technical power in the use of the graver is plainly apparent. There is scarcely any trace in his engravings of the artistic qualities of the models which he followed. The shortcomings of his work become distasteful to us on comparing them with Botticelli's creations; and they seem to have been no less unsatisfactory to the original printer and publisher. Of the entire hundred plates which were contemplated, only the first eighteen of the Inferno were completed, and even these were not inserted in all the copies offered for sale. Most of the copies of the 1481 Dante which have come down to us, contain only the first and third of the eighteen engravings; and several have none at all. Even the special copy printed on vellum, which Landino presented to the Signoria of Florence, has not a single one of those plates. With regard to the engraver, Baccio Baldini, of whom Vasari speaks, we are completely ignorant of his career. No information on the subject has been discovered

down to the present time; and there is not a trace of any one bearing that name, among the engravers and goldsmiths of whom we find record in the Florentine archives of the fifteenth century.

The workmen of that time must have experienced no little difficulty in setting the copper-plates and printing them in their places, in the way in which it was done in the *Monte Santo* and the Dante. The requisite spaces were of course duly left blank by the compositor, but the copper-plate printer did not always succeed in working the engraving exactly in its proper position. In the Dante as well as in the *Monte Santo*, the impressions are for the most part so much out of line as to lean sideways, giving an awkward and ugly appearance to the pages which they were intended to beautify.

A point of special interest in the matter which we are now discussing, is the circumstance that the first Florentine books printed with illustrations, issued from the press of a foreigner, a German, as we have already seen. The same man, Nicolaus Lorenz, published, about the year 1480, another large work — Berlinghieri's *Sette Giornate della Geographia* — containing many maps cleverly engraved on copper. When it is remembered that Konrad Sweynheim and Arnold Buckinck had, only two years before, produced the first illustrated edition of Ptolemy's Geography (Rome, 1478) with maps designed and engraved by themselves; the logical conclusion that follows from the combination of those facts is irresistible. We must infer that German workmen, if not absolutely the first introducers of engraving on metal and wood (as they probably were) exercised at least a most important influence upon its early developement in Italy.

The Dante of 1481 remained for a long time the latest example of a work illustrated with copper-engravings in its text. The difficulties which attended such a mode of decoration were enough to deter the printers from any similar attempt; and it would seem as though the very notion of producing illustrated books was completely abandoned in Florence for a considerable time. It was not till ten years later that such works began to make their reappearance in that city; but the process then employed was that

of wood-engraving, a method of illustration more in harmony with the principle of typography. The results of this new departure were those characteristic Florentine woodcuts, of which, as a class, we have already sketched the general artistic features.

In this place it is appropriate to mention a work of unique kind, half-Italian and half-German, to which reference has been made on a previous page. We allude to the woodcuts which appeared in the edition of Turrecremata's *Meditationes* printed by Johann Numeister in 1479. Originally an assistant of Gutenberg at Mentz, Numeister had become an independent printer, with a somewhat unsettled career. From 1470 to 1472 he was at work at Foligno; in 1479-80 he was again in Mentz; from 1480 to 1484 he had a press at Albi in Languedoc; and he was finally one of the many printers of Lyons. It was till recently supposed that Numeister's Turrecremata was a product of his Foligno press; but M. Claudin's investigations[1] have shown that belief to be erroneous and proved that the book was printed at Mentz.[2]

The illustrations in Numeister's edition are freely copied from the woodcuts in the volume which Ulrich Hahn had printed at Rome, but landscape-backgrounds, which were entirely absent in Hahn's designs, are added wherever suitable. The execution is clumsy; the small figures with their disproportioned heads are coarsely and unskilfully drawn. The method of treatment is however interesting for its peculiarities, which remind us at once of the style of the so-called "dotted-prints" (Schrotblätter). Nevertheless, there runs through all the series of Numeister's illustrations, a certain strain or manner which is distinctly un-Germanic; and we may notice that in the Florentine woodcuts, ten years later, a somewhat similar peculiarity is observable. It is not improbable that Numeister had already prepared his Turrecremata for the press before he quitted Foligno, and that the blocks were cut there under direct Italian influence, but not worked for publication until he reached

[1] Claudin (A.) Origines de l'Imprimerie à Albi. Les pérégrinations de J. Numeister. Paris, 1880. 8vo.

[2] The words of the colophon are as follows "Contemplacoes .. per Johannem de Turrecremata .. impresse p. iohannem numeister clericum maguntinu anno dni Millesimoquadringentesimoseptuagesimonono . ."



St. Jacopone kneeling before the Madonna. From the *Laudi* of Jacopone da Todi. Florence, 1491.

Mentz. The same woodcuts reappear in another issue of the book, printed by him at Albi.

Wood-engravings were apparently never used in Florentine books before the year 1490. There are two works bearing that date known to us, each containing a single illustration. One of these is the first edition of the *Laudi* of Jacopone da Todi,[1] a mystic of the order of St. Francis, who is chiefly renowned as the author of the *Stabat mater*. To him also are assigned the best of the *laudi*, those hymns in which the religious poetry of the thirteenth century found its highest expression; but he did not write everything that bears his name, which has become, as it were, a personification of a number of unknown authors.

On the reverse of the eighth leaf there is a woodcut in outline, finely drawn and executed; in which the beatified monk Jacopone is represented on his knees, crowned with rays of glory, and praying to the Virgin who, seated within a mandorla,[2] and surrounded by cherubim, leans towards him from above. It is an exquisite picture, full of the same delicate charm as distinguishes the fine silver-point drawings of the Florentine school at that period; and exhibiting such an individualised character in its design that we are involuntarily prompted to enquire the name of the artist. The printer was Francesco Buonaccorsi, whose name as a typographer or publisher frequently recurs between 1486 and 1496; but none other of his books is akin to this.

The second of the two works above referred to is an edition of Domenico Cavalca's *Specchio di Croce*, printed by Francesco di Dino.[3] It contains on the reverse of the first leaf a woodcut of the Crucifixion, shaded with slight hatchings. It is well and carefully executed, but bears no comparison with the beautiful engraving in the *Laudi*.

The distinguishing qualities of Florentine wood-engraving, with its powerful effects of light and shade, are found in their full

[1] Hain, 9355.

[2] A halo of almond shape that encircles the entire figure.

[3] Specimen hist. crit. Editionum Italicarum Saec. XV. Romae, 1794. 4to. p. 320: Domenico Cavalca Pisanus. Spechio di Croce. Impreso in Firenze per Franciescho di Dino di Jacapo Fiorentino. 1490. 4to.

developement in the illustrations produced in that city from the year 1491 onwards. An edition of Bettini's *Monte Santo di Dio* published in that year, furnishes the earliest example of that mode of artistic treatment, so far as our research has been able to ascertain. We have already spoken of the first edition of the same work, in dealing with the books published at Florence containing copper-plate illustrations The new edition of 1491[1] exhibits the same designs as its fore-runner, but executed on wood, instead of metal. There are three of them. One is an allegorical picture of the Ladder to Heaven; the second is a figure of Christ in the "mandorla"; each of these being full-page size. The third is a smaller woodcut representing hell in the manner which had become customary, in imitation of the fresco in the Campo Santo at Pisa. Although the copper-plates of the first edition furnished the models from which these woodcuts were executed, they are by no means slavish copies of their originals, but on the contrary display a freedom and delicacy of treatment peculiar to themselves. The best qualities of Florentine technique are shown in these woodcuts; for example, in the truly tender and noble figure of Christ on the first leaf, and the admirable rendering of expression in the faces of the little cherubim. The effect is powerful, harmonious, and full of grace. The forms, and the general character of the design, are strongly suggestive of Filippino Lippi's influence upon the style of Florentine art.

Many of the details make it probable that the printer of the book, Johannes Petri of Mentz, — under his Italianised name of "Giovanni Thodesco da Maganza", — was directly connected with the production of the woodcuts. We do not allude to the composition or the drawing of these illustrations, but merely to the executive skill with which the blocks were cut. Johannes Petri was one of the earliest group of typographers who settled in Florence. After the not very effectual attempt of Bernardo Cennini to introduce printing into that city in 1471, — of which we have spoken in a former paragraph — Petri made his

[1] Hain, 1277. Colophon: Impressa nella inclita cipta di Firenze per Ser Lorenzo di Morgiani et Giouanni Thodesco da Maganza. 1491. folio.

appearance in the following year, and established a new press, but with little more success apparently than his precursor. He published an edition of Boccaccio's Philocopo in 1472; but from that date onward we hear no more about him as a printer until 1491. He then reappears as in partnership with a certain Lorenzo Morgiani; and the *Monte Santo* of which we have been speaking bears their united names. It is difficult to account for the lapse of those nineteen years. Can it be that Johann Petri's typographical activity was continuous, and that all the books produced by him during that period[1] have been utterly lost? Or was it that some different branch of industry absorbed his attention? We have no information beyond the fact that he worked as a die-sinker, or rather type-cutter, for other printers. In 1474, the monastic press of San Lorenzo at Ripoli was instituted by two brothers of the order, Domenico da Pistoja and Pietro da Pisa. For the purpose of working it, they associated with themselves firstly Hippolito, a man otherwise unknown as a printer; and secondly, in 1476, Johannes of Mentz. This connexion lasted but a short while. In 1478, the monks bought from Johannes the matrices for a fount of Roman type with all the appurtenances ("madri della Lettera antica colle majuscole et sue breviature per prezzo di dieci fiorini d'oro larghi." — Fossi, Bibliotheca Magliabech., I, introduction). In his double capacity of printer and type-cutter, Johannes Petri was undoubtedly utilising the industrial skill which he had acquired in Germany. Nor can his ability have been limited to the exercise of those two functions. A workman who at that period was competent to execute the very difficult operation of punch-cutting, must surely have been acquainted with wood-engraving, an art so closely akin to the other, and so extensively practised in his native country. From the dexterity which enabled him to produce matrices of the *lettera antica*, a form of type with which he could have obtained no familiarity in Germany, we can readily judge that he would also have been capable of

[1] The only book which might with any probability be ascribed to his press at that time, is an undated edition of Petrarch's *Triumphi*. See Bernard, Histoire de l'Imprimerie, II, p. 241.



From the Monte Santo di Dio. Florence, 1491.

accomodating his skill as a woodcutter to the stylistic requirements of Italian designers. If Johannes Petri were indeed the engraver of the woodcuts in the *Monte Santo* of 1491, we should be justified in assigning to him the credit of having contributed in a most important degree to the developement of Florentine wood-engraving. In the existing state of our knowledge, however, we can neither verify the fact nor assume the probability of the conclusion: their possible truth is all that we seek to indicate.

A second book with woodcuts was published by Petri in 1491. It is a small manual of Arithmetic, dedicated, strangely enough, to no less a person than Giuliano dei Medici.[1] Ornamental borders, and minute illustrations representing all kinds of trades and occupations, with figures of animals and monsters, decorate the pages of this little volume.

Johann Petri's endeavours to produce illustrated books were soon emulated by another Florentine wood-engraver, Antonio Miscomini. From his fertile press issued many of those innumerable editions of Savonarola's tracts and sermons, which came out incessantly during the time when the fame of the inspired monk was yet unbroken, and all Florence rang with his praise. We can trace the activity of Miscomini's presses in a series of works dated from 1481 to 1495; but there is no evidence that he printed any illustrated book before 1493, in which year an edition of Savonarola's *Tractato dell' Umilita*[2] was published by him. The first leaf of this treatise exhibits an outline woodcut of great excellence, representing the half-length figure of the Saviour, standing in the sepulchre and supported by two angels. The style of the design is strongly suggestive of Filippino Lippi.[3]

Miscomini's most important work was an edition of the celebrated book of Jacopo de Cessoli on the Game of Chess; which he

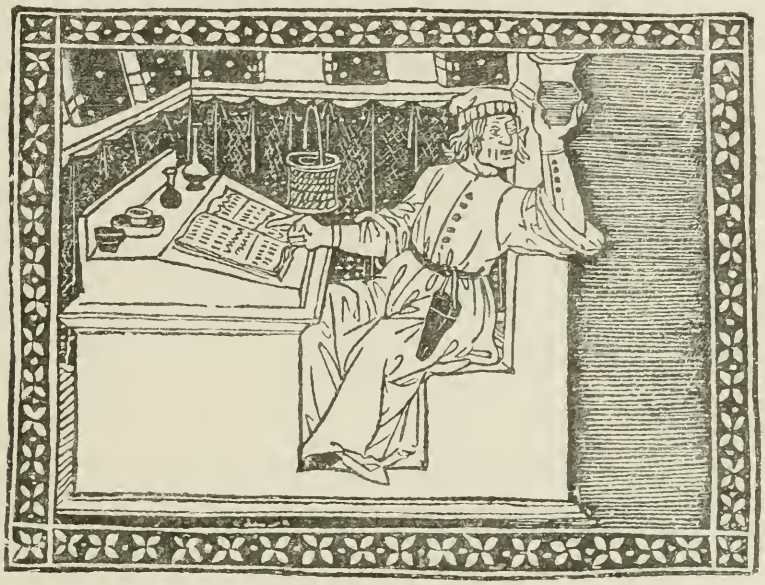
[1] Philippi Calandri de Arithmetica Opusculum ad Julianum Medicem . . . Impresso nella excelsa cipta di Firenze per Lorenzo di Morgiani et Giovanni Thedesco da Maganza.

[2] Tractato dell humilita co(m)posto p(er) frate Hieronymo da Ferrara . . . Colophon: Impresso in Firenze per Antonio Miscomini. Adi ultimo di giugno 1492. 4to. — Fossi, Biblioth. Magliabechiana, p. 545.

[3] Reproduced in Gruyer, les Illustrations des écrits de Jérome Savonarola. Paris, 1879 4to. p. 51.

published in an Italian version. The original treatise had enjoyed a wide popularity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is an essay on the moral virtues, in which the different pieces used in the game of chess, according to their degrees of rank and the rules by which they move, are made to symbolise the various conditions of life, and to illustrate the powers and duties of every class of society.[1]

The woodcut on the title-page represents a king, before whom two players are seated at a chess-table, surrounded by a group



THE PHYSICIAN
From the Giuoco degli Scacchi of Jacopo de Cessoli. Florence, 1493.

of observers. There is a youthful slenderness in the figures which seems to reveal the characteristics of Sandro Botticelli's manner. This is less apparent in the other woodcuts of the book, although their execution is by no means inferior to that of the title-illustration. They represent the various classes of mankind. We give

[1] Jacobus de Cessolis: Libro di Giuocho di Scacchi intitolato de costumi deglhuomini et degli offitii de nobili . . . Impresso in Firenze per Maestro Antonio Miscomini, 1493. 4to. Hain, 4900.

here a facsimile reproduction of "the Physician", as an example of the original and ingenious manner in which the unknown artist contrived to make the wood-block yield the effect of colour.

From the striking artistic and technical excellence which appears in the woodcuts executed at Florence in and after 1490, for the illustration of books, we are led to the conviction that works so perfect of their kind could not have been the earliest examples of the Florentine school of wood-engraving. That school must have had an anterior existence, throwing its history back to a date previous by some years at least; and in such a primary stage, its labour, if not bestowed on the illustration of books, was undoubtedly devoted to the production of single prints, until the time arrived when the typographers began to claim the service of the block-cutters. The correctness of our assumption is justified by the discovery of a large and remarkable woodcut view of the city of Florence, which, as we shall see, was engraved between 1486 and 1490. The dimensions of this print are such as would be, even in our own days, of the rarest occurrence. It is composed of seven separate pieces, which, united, form a sheet, 585 millimètres in height, and 1315 millimètres in the length of its engraved surface.

The design is a sort of middle term between a bird's eye-view and a plan, taken from an ideal perspective. The spectator's stand-point is in the Southwest, in front of the old city-walls; somewhere on the left bank of the Arno, between the former Porta San Friano and the existing gate of San Pier Gattolini. At this point, in the front of the picture, and close to an imaginary line of rocks, a man, with a drawing-board on his knees, is sitting, garbed in the costume of the time. Beneath his feet stretches out the old Santo-Spirito quarter of the city, and behind it rises the Palazzo Pitti, differing considerably from its present form, and showing a horizontal row of only seven windows. Opposite lie the districts on the right bank of the Arno, with the Duomo, the façade of which is supported by pilasters. The Strozzi palace is as yet non-existent. The chain of hills around Florence forms the back-ground, and in the corner on the left we get a

glimpse of the Duomo and the monastery of Fiesole, on the heights. In the middle view, the Arno is flowing towards the left; and a weir upon it, near the front, is in course of being built or repaired. A boat with men in it is moving across the river; and other figures variously engaged give animation to the landscape. In the sky overhead there is a scroll bearing the word "*Fiorenza*".

In its technical treatment, this enormous engraving exhibits a close correspondence in many ways to the Florentine woodcuts of the epoch which we have been considering. The general effect is very powerful; the shading is indicated by very fine and close parallel strokes without any hatchings; and the wall-spaces are dotted with points or with very short lines arranged as points. This is quite in the style of the Florentine book-illustrations. The hills and the plan of the ground are marked by rolling undulations. The whole disposition of the picture is such as to shew that the artists, however skilful, were not yet expert enough in the treatment of such large designs. We give here an exact reproduction of the right-hand corner portion of the print, and also a reduced facsimile of the entire sheet. The only extant copy known to us of this elaborate and extensive engraving is now in the Berlin Print-room. It is not a very excellent impression, and seems to have been worked at a more recent date than the original issue of the woodcut, but not later than the sixteenth century.

We cannot dwell here upon the importance of this print in relation to the topographical and architectural history of Florence. A discussion on the subject from that point of view would probably be fruitful in its results, and might enable us to narrow the limits of the period to which its composition should be assigned; — at least to form a truer conjecture of the date than can be looked for here. That it must be placed earlier than the close of the fifteenth century, is proved beyond a doubt by the absence of the Palazzo Strozzi. Indeed that fact alone should suffice as evidence that the design preceded the year 1489, in which the construction of the palace was begun, since we observe in the print that its site was still occupied by other houses, the demolition of which must have taken place before the new building could have been laid out. It might on the other hand be considered likely that

the palace was already in course of construction, but had not yet risen within the line of sight above the tops of the intervening houses, and was therefore unnoted by the designer. But this theory is precluded by a circumstance which furnishes an even stronger reason for concluding that our view of Florence was drawn before 1490. There appeared at Venice in 1486 a sort of universal Chronicle, with the title of *Supplementum Chronicarum*, of which we shall speak more particularly in the sequel. Amongst the numerous woodcut illustrations in this book, there are found many views of towns and localities, drawn in most instances from the designer's imagination, but including also some sketches from reality. In the 1486 edition to which we are alluding, Florence is represented by a conventional woodcut which does duty on another page for Bologna; but in a newer edition produced in 1490, there is substituted for it a small but correct illustration of the actual Florence, giving its position on the Arno and the situation of the cathedral, in a way which leaves much to be desired, but which is in the main a faithful representation of the city. On examining this woodcut attentively, we cannot but conclude that the man who designed it had before his eyes a copy of the large View of Florence which is described above. Thus, while, in 1486, the publisher of the Supplementum had no correct delineation of that city to comprise amongst his illustrations, he certainly was in possession of such a delineation — without doubt, our large sheet — when preparing the edition of 1490. From these circumstances, the deduction is easy and obvious, that our plan was engraved in the interval between the two editions of the Supplementum, that is from 1486 to 1490.

Soon afterwards our view of Florence was copied for a second time; in the well known Chronicle compiled by Hartmann Schedel, the Nuremberg physician and humanist, and printed in that city in 1493. The copy in the Nuremberg Chronicle is considerably larger than the one in the Supplementum. It fills two open pages of the book, which, as nearly every one knows, is of large folio size. In the Latin edition those two pages are the reverse of folio 86 and the obverse of 87; the German edition is not different. The view, as given in Schedel's chronicle, is a sort of compendium



SECTION FROM THE LARGE VIEW OF FLORENCE


S. SPIRITO



VIEW OF FLORENCE

WOODCUT DESIGNED ABOUT 1480–90

FACSIMILE (REDUCED) FROM THE UNIQUE COPY IN THE ROYAL PRINT-ROOM AT BERLIN

of the Florentine original. Everything in it is much coarser, a crowd of details are omitted, several arbitrary changes are introduced, the entire work has become slipshod and superficial; but a comparison of the two prints allows no doubt of their connexion. They are both taken from the same point of view, the principal groups of buildings are alike in each, the boat is seen crossing the Arno at the same place and in the same direction, but in the Nuremberg woodcut the engraver has, for his own convenience, reduced its three occupants to one. Even in technical method, the illustration in Schedel's book seems to have caught the character of the Florentine print.

The view of Florence is one of the most fairly correct of those pictures of towns which appear in the Nuremberg Chronicle; and in this respect is comparable only with that of Venice. For their plan of the latter city, it is manifestly evident that the Nuremberg illustrators made use of the large woodcut in Breydenbach's *Reise nach Jerusalem,* which represents the Riva degli Schiavoni and the Piazzetta at Venice. Just as our unique large print was the best existing view of Florence, so was the engraving in Breydenbach the best representation of the city of St. Mark. Breydenbach's book[1] was printed for the first time in 1486 at Mentz, by or for the painter "Erhard Reuwich of Utrecht", in its Latin original; and many editions and translations appeared before the close of the century, in German, Dutch, French, and Spanish. The woodcuts of the first edition are masterpieces of design and execution. According to a statement made in the text, Erhard Reuwich, "the Utrecht painter" of whom we know nothing except from this book, was the artist whose hand created those admirable works. He would also seem to have been the printer, but there is some reason for supposing that the typographical labour was performed at Schoeffer's press. But we must here relinquish any further consideration of Breydenbach's interesting book, on its own account; as our investigation is merely concerned with its view of Venice and the relation between that picture and our large Florentine illustration.

[1] Hain, 3956.

Reuwich's view of Venice is older, as we may at once assume without hesitation, than the plan of Florence. The latter could scarcely have come into existence before 1486, and even if begun so soon, must have occupied a considerable time in its accomplishment. However excellent the Venice engraving in the Breydenbach may be, it is assuredly by no means such an elaborate and finished work of landscape delineation as the "Fiorenza".

The "Venice", as well as the other woodcuts in Breydenbach's book, is an oblong panoramic view, giving the most important and characteristic features of the prospect in outline. The "Florence" of our unknown artist is, on the contrary, conceived with much greater freedom and boldness, and it exhibits a complete mastery of perspective, so that all the objects within the scope of a bird's-eye view are brought out upon the plan in their due proportion with regard to the assumed position of the designer. In technical ability, in distinctness and clearness of drawing, and in the skilful execution of the manual part, Reuwich was decidedly superior to the Florentine artist; and the Breydenbach woodcuts take a high place even among the best performances of the fifteenth century, by virtue of their truth to nature and their finished technical excellence. Nevertheless, in the "Fiorenza" we have, perhaps, the very first example of an engraved bird's-eye view, exhibiting the whole plan of a city with comprehensive fulness.

The sketcher in the foreground is no doubt the designer's actual portrait; but it is not likely that we shall ever be able to identify him.

It is significant, when we turn our attention upon the subject of the connexion between German art-workmen and the development of Italian wood-engraving, that, of all the artists who produced woodcuts in the Florentine manner, only one name has survived, and that one is unquestionably German — Johannes de Francfordia. It is to be presumed that he worked in Florence, to judge from the style, which is wholly Florentine, of a large woodcut bearing his name, now in the British Museum (Passavant, I, p. 132). It represents a fierce fight between naked men in a wood. The composition is a tolerably faithful copy of an

engraving on copper by Antonio Pollaiuolo (Bartsch, No. 2). The subject of the design is not very clear. It is intended probably to represent a combat of gladiators, or something of similar character; and may have been chosen by Pollaiuolo in order that he might indulge his taste for modelling the nude form in violent action and strained attitudes. In the copy signed by Johannes de Francfordia, the characteristic design is fairly well imitated, while at the same time the effect of the engraved work has been modified to suit the requirements of the woodblock. Masses of simple strokes, without any hatching, give solid relief to the forms which are drawn in strong outlines. The deep blackness of the ground is also a marked feature of the Florentine style. This work is the only one by Johannes de Francfordia of which we have any certain knowledge. He may have produced others; but whether they are now totally lost, or lie unrecognised among the anonymous woodcuts of the time, it is impossible for us to ascertain. Crowds of his fellow-countrymen, art-workers like himself, were then trooping over the Alps to find employment in Italian ateliers; and we shall find them chiefly settled in the towns of North Italy when we come to that branch of our subject.

Amongst the illustrations issued in single leaves or broadsheets, which show by the simplicity and coarseness of their execution, that they belong to the earliest stage of Florentine wood-engraving, we may here mention the following pieces. —

Young Tobias carrying the fish, and accompanied by the angel Raphael; — a leaf of very primitive character, in the Paris *Cabinet d'Estampes*.[1] The composition is very similar to that of some pictures in which the same scene is represented, which two Florentine masters of the fifteenth century have left to us. One is the painting in the Turin Gallery, ascribed to the school of Antonio Pollaiuolo; and two others are compositions by Sandro Botticelli, at Turin, and in the Florence Accademia. In the figure-types, it perhaps more nearly resembles the Botticellis. The two angels who appear on the right and left of the principal figure in all the

[1] Reproduced in Delaborde (H.) La Gravure en Italie avant Marc-Antoine. Paris, p. 207.

three paintings, are omitted in the woodcut. — A small reproduction or imitation of this engraving is frequently found in Florentine printed books; as, for example, in the vignette on the title-page of the "Rappresentatione de langiolo Raphaelo."

There is also a "St. Jerome in the Desert" in the Paris Cabinet, of early-Florentine origin, which is remarkable for the large scale of its execution.

The Berlin print-room possesses a Madonna, executed in a style of great simplicity, and belonging likewise to the earlier period of Florentine wood-engraving. Its colouring and bad state of preservation do not permit us to give a facsimile of this interesting cut.

In the same collection there is a very charming little print which represents an infant lying asleep, his head supported by a human skull, — a favorite emblem of Youth, Death, and the Instability of Life. In the mode of manipulation we discover the special characteristics of the Florentine school of wood-engraving during the last decade of the fifteenth century.

Of somewhat later date is a large woodcut (371 millimètres in height by 252 in breadth), preserved, with many other treasures of Italian engraving in the fifteenth century, in the Kunsthalle at Hamburg. It represents the Madonna, with the Infant Saviour, and the child St. John; and, although executed simply in outline, appears to be of unquestionable Florentine origin in or about the year 1500. We give it here in a reduced facsimile, as being a rare example of its kind. The indecision of style, and the timidity of conception, which we observe in the design of this fine print, remind us of Raffaellino del Garbo's manner.

If we consider that no special attention has hitherto been paid to the primitive woodcuts of Italy, whether by students of art-history, or by collectors and public institutions, and that their true value is but rarely recognised, — we shall cease to wonder at the comparative fewness of the existing specimens. The interest which is felt in Italian copper-engravings of the fifteenth century, and even in the wood-engravings of the sixteenth, has not been extended to the woodcuts of the former century, owing to the insignificant appearance which most of them present at first sight,



The Virgin, with the infant Saviour and the child St. John. Single print. In the Kunsthalle at Hamburg.
Reduced Facsimile.

and to the poor preservation in which they are usually found. Yet the existence of such a work as the large view of Florence shews that the art of wood-engraving in that city had attained to a considerable degree of developement about the year 1490; and there must have been, as the other surviving examples attest, a steady production of single prints going on at that time. We possess documentary evidence of the activity and skill of the Florentine workshops, in an extensive series of illustrated works, and an innumerable quantity of small chapbooks and other popular pieces containing woodcuts, which appeared collaterally with those single prints. Mention has already been made of the illustrated tracts and sermons of Savonarola. Most of these are undated, and bear no indication either of the printer's name, or of the place of impression; but they exhibit so unmistakeably the characteristics of Florentine art, that no doubt can remain as to their origin. Some were certainly printed by Johannes Petri, several by Miscomini, and many others issued from the flourishing press of Francesco di Dino. This is ascertainable by means of the woodblocks which those printers used repeatedly in different books bearing their imprints, without much regard to appropriateness.[1]

The first place among those illustrated editions of the Savonarola tracts, belongs probably to his *Arte del ben morire*, a sermon preached on All-Souls' Day in 1496.[2] The discourse was, as the title announces, taken down at the actual moment of its delivery, by Lorenzo Violi, the editor and publisher of many of Savonarola's sermons; and although there are three editions, not one of which is marked with a date or a place, there can scarcely be a doubt that they were all printed in Florence about the same time, very soon after the occasion they refer to. On the title-page

[1] The monograph by Gustave Gruyer already cited, gives a list of the illustrations which appeared in the various editions of Savonarola's pieces; discussing them chiefly in relation to their religious or spiritual significance.

[2] Predica dell Arte del ben morire facta dal Reuerendo Patre Frate Hieronymo da Ferrara a di 11 di Novembre M.CCCCLXXXXVI racolta da Ser Lorezo Violi da la uiua uoce del p'edicto Padre metre ch' predicaua... At end: Laus. Deo. 4to.

of the edition which we have cited, there is a woodcut representing Death in a female form of terrific aspect, armed with a scythe, and flying through the air; evidently suggested by the figure of Death in the Campo Santo at Pisa. The ground beneath her is strewn with corpses.

The second illustration exhibits a youth, close to whom stands Death, pointing with one hand to the hell that lies below, and with the other to the gathering hosts of heaven. It is a work of the most genuine Florentine type, executed with remarkable delicacy and power. Not less charming is the third picture, in which a man is seen lying on his deathbed in a chamber of large proportions, grand in its severe simplicity. A monk is offering consolation to the dying man, while his relatives are standing or kneeling around. Death, watching his prey, is at the foot of the bed; and three demon-shapes are waiting at the other end. But the Virgin hovers above the scene and takes to herself the departing soul which rises in the form of an infant. This composition is the only one which has, in its details, any suggestion of the designs that were so widely known in Germany and the Netherlands, of the popular *Ars Moriendi* of the North. But the Florentine woodcut is no more an imitation of the pictures in that book, than Savonarola's sermon is, beyond its mere intitulation, akin to the ascetic mediæval treatise known as the *Ars Moriendi*. The Teutonic "Art of Dying" deals with the conflict between the opposing powers of Heaven and Hell, the machinations of the devils to secure their victim, his stedfast resistance to their temptations, and the final interposition of the angels to save him in the moment of death. Savonarola's treatise, on the contrary, is chiefly an admonition counselling men how to live in order that they may die happily. There is a similar contrast between the two types of illustration. The picture of the dying man's bedchamber is a composition breathing all the dignified tranquillity of the Florentine Renaissance, while in the designs of the Northern book no other end was aimed at than to fill the minds of sinners with dread and terror.

Although Savonarola's sermon was so different in its tendency from the old Ars Moriendi, the latter treatise with its horrible

illustrations was probably the moving cause which inspired him, directly or indirectly, with the idea of his *Arte del ben morire*. During the second half of the fifteenth century, several editions were published in Italy of a work by Domenico di Capranica, Cardinal of Fermo (deceased in 1458); in which the trials and consolations of the dying were treated in a fashion quite similar to that of the German or Dutch blockbook. We are acquainted with two illustrated editions of Capranica's Ars Moriendi, the engravings in which are direct imitations of the German woodcuts. One of those books bears the date of 1490, and was apparently printed in Florence, although the place is not indicated. It was brought out by two German printers, and is especially remarkable for the plain statement, made in its colophon, that the woodcuts were actually reproduced or recomposed from old (German) prints. The words are — "Stampado fu questa Operetta con li figuri accomodati per Iohannem clein e Piero himmel de Alemania".[1]

The second illustrated edition of Capranica's work is undoubtedly a Florentine production, probably from Johannes Petri's press.[2] Most of the thirty four woodcuts in this little tract are tolerably free imitations of the German Ars Moriendi; but there are a few which exhibit the Florentine type both in conception and in technical execution. Amongst the latter there is one which is evidently an immediate copy from the Savonarola tract mentioned above. We allude to the design of "Death and the Young man", which is here reproduced in a style markedly inferior to that of its original. There is more originality in the picture of the deathbed scene, which is wholly recomposed in an independent manner, and executed with much skill. The physician and a female figure are standing at the foot of the bed, on which a young man is

[1] The only known copy of the edition is at Althorp. See Dibdin, Bibl. Spenc. IV, p. 443.

[2] Della Arte del ben morire cioe ī Gratia di Dio. Compilato . . per . . Cardinale di fermo neglianni del nostro Signore MCCCCLII. At the end: Finito ellibro del ben morire tutto storiato Deo Gratias. The only known copy, now in the Fisher collection, in London (Catalogue, 28) is identical with that described by Dibdin (Bibliographical Decameron, I, p. 140) as being in the Rice collection.

lying, while Death with his scythe is outside the chamber-door, knocking for admittance.[1]

It is not our purpose to enumerate all the Florentine editions of Savonarola's opuscula in which there are illustrations. Gruyer's book to which reference has already been made, can be consulted with advantage notwithstanding his deplorable omission of bibliographical particulars. A very useful, but far from complete, list



Woodcut on the title-page of Savonarola's Libro della Simplicita della Vita christiana. Firenze, 1496.

is given by Brunet *(Manuel du Libraire et de l'Amateur de Livres,* fifth edition, Vol. V, columns 158-173).

Most of the Florentine productions already noticed are works of small size and with but few woodcuts. We now encounter,

[1] Reproductions of these engravings are found in Gruyer, pp. 79, 82. The same illustrations appear also in an edition of Savonarola's *Ars Moriendi,* different from the one mentioned above — another proof of the difficulty of tracing such designs to their true origin, by reason of the complications arising from the frequent and diverse use of the blocks, and the custom of making copies; par-

in the years between 1495 and 1501, a succession of books illustrated on a large scale, each containing a long series of woodcuts appropriated to its subject. Besides Florence, only Venice could then produce works of such pretention; certainly not any other of the Italian cities in which printing flourished. The *Epistole et Evangelii*, printed in 1495 by Lorenzo di Morgiani in partnership with Johannes of Mentz,[1] contains some two hundred woodcuts, many of which had however already appeared in the printed



Christ with the Samaritan woman at the well. From the Epistole et Evangelii, Florence, 1495.

tracts of Savonarola, and, in so far as they are of older date than the Epistole, are only re-worked in this volume. But a very large proportion of the entire number is formed by engravings specially designed and cut for the book. The inequality of execution, and

ticularly as all the editions referred to are of excessive rarity, and cannot be collated and examined together in any one place. Therefore, no thorough study of the subject can be made, until we possess such a number of reproductions of the early woodcuts as will place our knowledge in respect to them on something like the same basis as our acquaintance with drawings through facsimiles.

[1] The only known copy of this edition (which seems to be the first) is in the collection of Mr. Richard Fisher, in London. See his catalogue, p. 27.

the irregularity of the dimensions, which strike us in these various illustrations, betoken the diversity of their origin. Many are executed with the utmost delicacy; and yield, in the graceful composition of their designs, an admirable reflection of the contemporary art of painting in Florence. The title is surrounded by a large woodcut border filling the whole extent of the folio page; in which, a rich ornamental pattern of festoon-work, with figures of dolphins in the spaces, encloses a circlet bearing representations



The presentation in the temple. From the Epistole et Evangelii. Florence, 1498.

of the apostles Peter and Paul. The essential principle of the Florentine method of wood-engraving, which consists in the use of large masses of black on the surface of the print, is applied in this instance with such finished skill as to produce a very powerful decorative effect.

This edition of the Epistles and Gospels, so thoroughly Florentine in its character, appears to have been a favorite book among the people, from the fact that many editions were called for, not only in the fifteenth, but also in the sixteenth century;

notwithstanding that the mode of illustration had ceased to be in vogue, and that the repeated use of the woodblocks rendered the later impressions worthless. The latest edition, so far as we have had ocular evidence, was issued in the year 1578.[1]

A book which enjoyed immense popularity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely the collection of fables usually ascribed to Æsop, was brought out by several typographers in the early days of the press; with illustrations distinctive, in each instance, of the local type of art. Such was the case in Germany, France, the Netherlands, England, and Italy. At the time of which we are speaking, Florence produced one of those editions, the text having been rendered into Italian metrical form by Accio Zucco, usually known as Accio Summa Campanea.[2]

In the drawing of the animal-figures we do not find the spirit and the quaint humour which German and also North-Italian artists often contrived to infuse into their illustrations of Æsop. The designs are painfully exact attempts to delineate the story in the text, and betray the workmanship of a mechanical hand; the cutting of the block is also very poorly done. It is true that these woodcuts exhibit some genuine features of the Florentine type; but the power to produce pictures dashed with the rough realistic vividness which alone can render such illustrations tolerable, was far beyond the artist's cunning. However, the art of wood-engraving at Florence was, on the whole, amply successful in supplying the demand for illustrations of popular fiction and poetry, at the epoch of which we are now speaking. The growth of poetic and romantic literature in Italy was followed up by the illustrators in a

[1] Pistole, Lezzioni, et Vangelii . . tradotti . . dal . . Francesco de Cattani. Firenze, 1578. fol.

[2] The only copy known to me of this edition (undescribed by any bibliographer) is in the Riccardiana (Stima della Bibl. Ricc., p. 60). It wants the beginning; folio A II begins thus — »Io mandero per tutto . . «; many gaps are found in the middle of the book. At the end: Impresso in Firenze per Ser Francesco Bonaccorsi ad instantia di Ser Piero Pacini Anno Domini M.CCCC.LXXXXV. Adi XVII di Septembre. 4to. Under the subscription, the publisher's mark of Piero Pacini (da Pescia). The fragmentary copy of the Riccardiana contains 44 woodcuts in the fables, executed in the Florentine manner, and each averaging 87 millimètres in height by 109 in breadth.

continuous production of editions ornamented with woodcuts; the designs frequently alternating, page for page, with the text. Besides this contemporary literature, new editions of the old authors, especially of Dante and Boccaccio, were constantly appearing, illustrated often with hundreds of engravings. In Venice, of course, the greater portion of this mass of illustrated publications came into being; but Florence took a very considerable share in its production.

It is curious that the Florentine woodcut books seem to have had a much more limited circulation than similar works published elsewhere. The editions may have been comparatively small, and the bookselling trade was probably less systematic and active in Florence, than the corresponding organisation at Venice which despatched books to all parts of the civilised world. These circumstances must be taken into account when we seek to understand why it is, that the early illustrated books of Florence have become bibliographical rarities of the highest order; many of them, indeed, surviving only in unique copies.

The *Morgante Maggiore* of Ludovico Pulci appeared in 1500 at Florence, in an edition decorated with more than two hundred woodcuts[1]. The interminable narrative spun out in this metrical romance of chivalry furnished the illustrator with rich material for his designs. They are conceived in a spirit of pedantic earnestness, and follow the incidents of the text closely; notwithstanding that the reader is often inclined to doubt Pulci's seriousness, and to suspect that these long-winded descriptions of impossible adventures

[1] Pulci (Ludovico) Morgante Maggiore. Folio A recto: "Morgante Maggiore", beneath which is a woodcut representing the giant Morgante engaged in conversation with a stout man supposed to be Roland. Below the woodcut, the text of the poem begins — "In principio era il uerbo", etc. At the end: "finito illibro chiamato Morgate maggiore Composto per Luigi Pulci Impresso in Firēze nel Anno. M.CCCCC. adi XXII di Gennaio". Folio. The only copy known to me is in the Vienna Hofbibliothek. The woodcuts in it, 220 in number, average 8 centimètres in height by 11 in breadth. — Seven of the smaller cuts reappear in an edition of the *Morgante Piccolo*, published in 1535. Fol. 1 recto: "Morgante Margutte", beneath which is the woodcut from the title of the *Maggiore*. At end: "Stampato ad Instantia di Maestre Francesco di Giouanni Benuenuto Nel 1535. (Florence) 4to. 14 leaves. The *Morgante Piccolo* is a kind of abstract from the larger poem.

achieved by Roland the knight and Morgante the Giant, were intended as a burlesque upon the ballads in which the street-singers of Florence delighted the populace with the old stories of Charlemagne and his paladins.

The woodcuts are marked by many various modes of treatment. It would appear that several different hands were engaged in their production; but they all exhibit the regular Florentine type of wood-engraving. In the earlier part of the work, they are very carefully drawn, and finished with extreme minuteness; but those which succeed are of inferior workmanship, frequently betraying haste and slovenliness. We have seen in the miniatures of illuminated manuscripts, a similar deterioration of artistic quality take place as the work approached its termination. It is as though the artist, and the patron whose commission he was executing — in the present instance, it was the printer — rarely contrived to maintain the enthusiasm and the indifference to expense, which are necessary to carry out such an undertaking to its end on a scale commensurate with the initial plan.

Akin to the above mentioned edition of the *Morgante*, but displaying in its illustrations a more even and uniform style from beginning to end, is the *Quadriregio* of Federigo Frezzi, published in 1508[1]. This book is now almost equally rare with the *Morgante*. It is a weak imitation of Dante's great poem, and was written before 1416, in which year Frezzi, then Bishop of Foligno, died. The poet wanders through the "four realms", of Love (il mondo), of Satan (l'inferno), of Vice (il purgatorio), and of Virtue (il paradiso). The engravings are fairly successful works of illustrative art, and generally superior to those of the *Morgante*. A somewhat monotonous effect is produced by the constant repetition of the

[1] *Folio A 1 recto:* Quatriregio interza rima uolgare che tracta di quatro Reami | cioe del Reame temporale mondano di questo mondo | nel quale Lauctore rimane inganato dallo Idio del | lamore quatro uolte. Depoi tracta del Rea | me di Plutone Re dellinferno. Et del | Purgatorio et terzo Reame & | del Paradiso cioe del Reame | della uirtu che e el Quarto. | *Fol. A 1 verso:* io Sono. *Fol. A 2 recto:* Incomincia el Libro intitolato Quatriregio . . . di Messer Fedrigo . . . Vescovo della cipta di Fuligno. *Fol. R (3) recto:* Finisce ellibro decto el Quatriregio . . . Impresso in Firenze adi XXVI. di Luglio. M.D.VIII. Ad petitione di Ser Piero Pacini di Pescia. *R (3) verso blank.* 102 leaves, folio.

figure of the poet, who appears in almost all the woodcuts in some phase of his peregrination. The composition and the design of many of these pictures are full of grace and charm; the engraver's work is altogether excellent. In the slender but well-proportioned figures, in their attitudes and movements, we distinctly recognise the characteristics of the Florentine school, and the style of Botticelli. The general quality of the work may be estimated from the



From the Quadriregio of Federigo Frezzi. Florence, 1508.

accompanying facsimiles; one of which is taken from an illustration in the "realm of Love" (libro I, cap. 2), the other from a scene in the "realm of Virtue" (lib. III, cap. 2) where the author encounters three nymphs who flee from him in terror.

On one of the woodcuts in the *Quadriregio* there is a monogram in which the letters L and V are combined. The compiler of the catalogue of Mr. Huth's library is of opinion that Luca Signorelli (Luca di Egidio di Ventura Signorelli) is indicated by those letters. There are indeed some remote resemblances to the

work of that master, in certain details of the figures and the draperies; but we discern so little trace of his special peculiarities in the designs of the *Quadriregio*, that the artist who drew them cannot even be asserted to have belonged to Signorelli's school. As for the monogram, it does not in any way justify the inference which has been drawn from it, since we know that Signorelli, whenever he marked his works, used the signature of "Lucas Cortonensis" and not "Venturi".



From the Quadriregio of Federigo Frezzi. Florence, 1508.

The *Quadriregio* was probably the last work of importance in which the older school of Florentine wood-engraving displayed its qualities at their highest point of excellence. In the *Regule florum musices* of Petrus de Conuntiis[1], there is a quarto-sized woodcut still exhibiting the manner of that school, but weak and worthless in design as well as in treatment.

[1] Printed by Bernardino Zuchetta (Brunet, I, column 1551).

Besides the large sets of illustrations to which we have called attention, Florence produced a vast number of scattered woodcuts in the ephemeral literature of pamphlets and tracts, often consisting of but a few pages. Such pieces, usually printed without a date, have sometimes a woodcut on every page; sometimes one at the beginning and another at the end. We have already spoken of one of the chief groups of this kind, — namely, the treatises of Savonarola. Other writings of similar character, occasional poems, secular or devout, and popular ballads, were often decorated with charming woodcuts. Most of the productions to which we are adverting here, belong to the period immediately before and immediately after the year 1500[1]. Amongst them, the numerous *Rappresentazioni*, of which so many editions were printed at Florence at that time, yield an exceptionally rich and delightful harvest for our gathering.[2]

The religious drama, the *Sacra Rappresentazione* (corresponding to the French *mystère* and the English "miracle-play") acquired

[1] We may specify here the titles of a few of the chief works in profane poetical literature, above referred to in general terms. — Politiano (Angelo). "La Giostra di Giuliano de Medici e la fabula di Orpheo . ." Under this intitulation is a woodcut representing a knight on horseback (— It had been previously used in the Giuoco degli Scacchi of 1493). At end: "Stampato in Firenze per Gianstephano di Carlo di Pauia astaza *(sic)* di ser Pietro Pacini da Pescia questo di XV. Dottobre M.D.XIII." 30 leaves, 4to. Some of the illustrations are of high excellence, and appear to belong to the period between 1490 and 1500. They may have been cut for an earlier edition of the "Giostra", but none such is known. — "Canzone per andar in maschera per Carnesciale fatte per piu persone" (Florence, before 1500). 4to. (Gamba, Testi di Lingua, 216). With a beautiful woodcut, representing a musical performance by maskers. — "Ballatette del Magnifico Lorenzo de Medici, di Messer Agnolo Politiano" (Florence, about 1500). 4to. (Gamba, 262). With a woodcut of dancing girls on the title. — "La Ferza de' Villani" ("A Scourge for Peasants"; Florence, a little after 1500). 4to. 6 leaves. With two excellent woodcuts. — "La nouella de' duo preti et un clerico inamorati duna donna". Without indication of place or date (Florence, about 1500). 4to. With two humorous woodcuts, finely designed.

[2] Some of these which belong by their dates to a later period, such as "La Rappresentatione del Re Superbo. In Fiorenza Appresso alla Badia. M.DLXVIII;" "La Historia di Giasone et Medea, In Fiorenza el Anno 1563;" "Storia dell Infelice Innamoramento di Gianfiore e Filomena. Stampata in Firenze nel M.D.LVI Del mese di Nouembre," — contain woodcuts, evidently from blocks which had been engraved in the earlier time referred to in the text, after designs by one of the anonymous artists of whom we have been treating.

a special developement in Florence; attaining its full maturity about the middle of the fifteenth century. The performance of such pieces was then looked upon as an indispensable portion of the public celebrations. All the narratives of the Old and New Testament, all the stories in the legends of the Saints, were made available for treatment in the *Rappresentazioni*. Few of the men to whose pious zeal and poetic ardour the literature of the Italian drama is indebted for those works, are now known by name; but



From the Rappresentatione di S. Apollonia Virgine et Martire.

many of the plays are marked by real literary power. Among the more considerable authors who can be identified, such as Feo Belcari and Pierozo Castellano de' Castellani, we find Lorenzo the Magnificent himself. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, profane subjects began to make their way into the circle previously devoted to religious story; and scenes dramatised from classical mythology became increasingly attractive.

That the popular interest in the *Rappresentazioni* extended beyond their performance on the stage, we have a proof in the

numerous editions which were printed. A large proportion of the extant pieces may never have been produced upon the boards. The contemporary impressions which were published at Florence, are of the usual shape and size of chapbooks; that is, in thin quarto *brochures*, generally containing one woodcut at the beginning and another at the end. They are seldom decorated with more than a very small number of such illustrations. The artist chose his subject from the text with care and judgment, so as to obtain



From the Rappresentatione di Agnolo Hebreo.

a picture suited for artistic display, and lending itself to vigorous and animated treatment. The engravings are frequently worked out with exquisite delicacy. It is not improbable that these compositions embody to some extent reminiscences of the actual scenic performance; and that the acted *Rappresentationi* may have exercised a manifold influence upon the plastic arts, — just as the typical figures, which appear in the Bible-pictures of the North, were demonstrably adapted from the histrionic presentment of characters in miracle-plays. More than once, perhaps, painters

have caught ideas from theatrical situations, and borrowed from the drama subjects for their allegorical and mythological compositions. Much that we today find difficult to understand in their pictures, has perhaps its undiscovered source and signification in one or other of the *Rappresentazioni.*

Uniform in outward appearance and in the style of their illustrations, with the *Rappresentazioni*, are the *Novelle* and *Poemetti*, two kindred species of popular literature. We give here



From the Nouella piacevole chiamata la Viola.

a facsimile of the title-woodcut of an edition of the "Nouella piaceuole chiamata la Viola".[1] This engraving is especially remarkable for its fine and graceful treatment, and for the delicate suavity of its well-proportioned figures. The hand of the

[1] Nuella piaceuole chiamata la Viola, Nella quale si uede una bellissima burla fatta da una Donna chiamata Viola, a tre Giouani suoi inamorati, con due Sonetti, & una Canzona a ballo aggiunti nuouamente nella fine. La quale nouella e molto dileteuole & da ridere. Nuouamente Stampata. Without indication of place and date. Only one woodcut.

artist who drew it is recognisable in many of the best illustrations in a number of books belonging to the class of Florentine popular literature.

We cannot here enumerate all the illustrated editions of the *Rappresentazioni*, nor even only the best of them. Their woodcuts are, as a rule, in the ordinary form of the Florentine vignettes of 1490-1500, and Botticelli's manner is clearly apparent in many of them. But several different styles are tolerably discernible throughout, a circumstance which points to the conclusion that many artists, or, as is more probable, two or three different workshops for block-engraving, were occupied in the production of those illustrations.[1]

So long as the old woodblocks held out, under the frequent and continual republication of the chapbooks in which they were used, and so long as the impressions retained at least the general features of the design, no matter how shadowy and blurred, — they were worked and re-worked until completely worn away. A mode of illustration, once grown into popular favour and become typical, remains in use long after the period in which the pictures had their origin. In Florence, as everywhere else, we find that popular art was genuinely conservative of older forms. Still down to the end of the sixteenth century, and sometimes even in the seventeenth, those woodcuts re-appeared constantly in the chapbooks. When, at last, an old block was no longer workable, it was replaced by a new one as nearly as possible like the former, but naturally, as a mere copy, inferior to its original. This process went on through a succession of copies, till in the end the design lost all its primitive qualities, and degenerated into coarse and inartistic ugliness. Examples are not lacking of such replication, extending sometimes to the number of four or five successive

[1] The Magliabecchiana in Florence, and the British Museum, possess rich collections of the various editions of the *Rappresentazioni*. For the bibliography of the subject, see Colomb de Batines: Bibliografia delle antiche Rappresentazioni Italiane sacre e profane . . Stampate nei Secoli XV. e XVI. Firenze, 1852. 8vo. — Ancona (Aless. d'): Sacre Rappresentationi di Secoli XIV. XV. e XVI. Firenze, 1872. 3 vols. 8vo. — Ancona: Origini del Teatro in Italia. Firenze, 1877. 2 vols. 8vo.

copies. We might instance the numerous editions of the *Ferza de' Villani*, and many other works. Often in the sixteenth-century editions of the old popular ballads, all kinds of woodcuts are mixed up together; good examples of the best period, poor copies of old engravings, and coarse impressions from blocks newly cut.

In those late reprints of the chapbooks with their old illustrations, to which we have been alluding, the spirit of the Florentine Quattrocento lived on to a time when, for the rest of the world, that form of art had become a mere historical tradition. But soon after the beginning of the sixteenth century, the graphic arts no longer found in Florence a home for their free exercise and cultivation. That honour now belonged to Venice. The production of woodcuts and of illustrated books become so completely concentrated there, that the further developement of Italian wood-engraving lay henceforward exclusively under the influence of the Venetian school. Only some sporadic examples of the art appeared occasionally in Florence; rarely rising above the level of mechanical mediocrity. The short space between 1490 and 1510 seems to have comprised the sole period in which Florence possessed ateliers of wood-engraving, animated by the specific qualities of the Florentine school, and capable of giving them genuine artistic expression.

In our preceding account of the series of Florentine woodcuts, — the second of a number of groups into which we have divided the products of Italian wood-engraving in the fifteenth century, — we dealt with a school which, after having developed a remarkable individuality wholly unconnected with the practice of the art in the rest of Italy, flourished for a little while and then suddenly faded away, leaving no trace behind. The North-Italian group, to which we now turn our attention, enjoyed a more vigorous and protracted life, and was extraordinarily fertile, especially in Venice. In that city, wood-engraving pursued its progress in a close parallel of relationship to the contemporary school of Painting,

and grew to be a distinct and flourishing branch of the Fine Arts. By means of large production and an extensive traffic, woodcuts became, in Venice and partly in other towns of North Italy, almost as truly popularised as in Germany. The art was applied to the creation of a vast number of separate prints, of both sacred and profane character, and to the illustration of printed books, in equal measure. Smaller local schools of wood-engraving arose and existed side by side with that of Venice.

It cannot be doubted that the developement of the art in North Italy owed much to German influence. Even in the earlier half of the fifteenth century, German prints were introduced as articles of commerce into Venice. Of this fact we have a proof in the decree issued by the Signoria in 1441, forbidding the importation of German playing-cards. When printing made its way into the peninsula, great numbers of German typographers set up presses in the cities of Northern Italy; and we may assume, although we have but little positive information on the matter, that the working printers were accompanied from Germany by journeymen wood-engravers. Names such as Johannes de Francfordia, Jacobus of Strassburg, Jacob Walch, betoken plainly the origin of the men who bore them. Soon after the appearance at Nuremberg of Dürer's engraved works, on wood and copper, they were reproduced in copies at Venice and elsewhere. We must however, by no means, regard wood-engraving in North Italy as an offshoot of the German school. As soon as the technique of the new art had been mastered by the Italian designers and block-cutters, they entered upon its practice with independent energy, and stamped their work with a distinctive national style. Even the German engravers in Italy, — we may to some degree instance those mentioned above — fell almost completely into the fashion of the country they laboured in. Imitations of foreign models are much more rarely found amongst Italian woodcuts than amongst Italian copper-engravings.

A characteristic feature of North Italian wood-engraving, in the period with which we are now concerned, is the design in pure outline, unmarked by any attempt to exhibit the play of light and shadow. This mode of treatment was so highly cultivated

in Venice, that it sometimes attained to a perfection, in which it would be difficult to say whether the designer's hand had been more exquisite or the engraver's skill more finished.

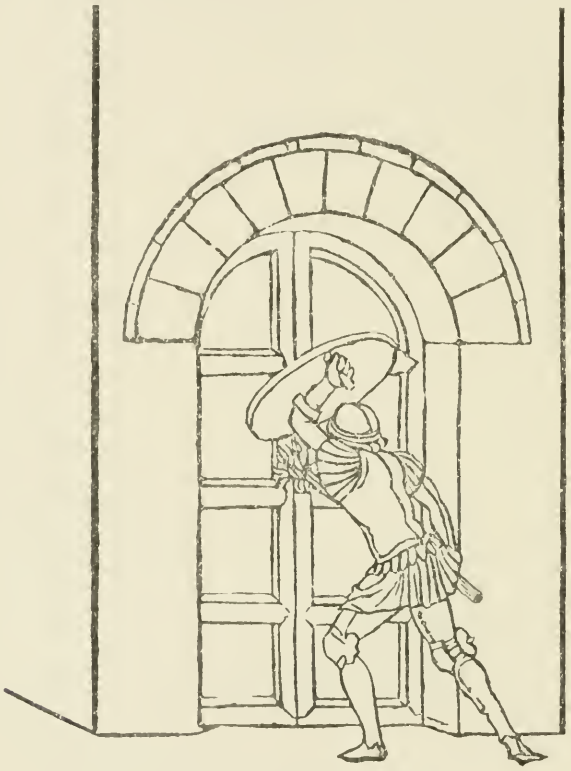
The outline-manner remained prevalent till the early years of the sixteenth century, when the love of colour which animated the later school of painting at Venice, began to affect the practice of wood-engraving likewise, and brought about a new style of treatment. The effort to produce effects of breadth and distance on the flat surface of the woodblock soon led to the abandonment of the older method. Its fine sharp lines were only suited to small dimensions and delicate work, such as the designs of Bellini and Mantegna required.

The earliest North-Italian woodcuts to which a date is attached, were executed in that pure outline-style. They are the illustrations which appeared in Valturio's book *De re militari,* which was printed at Verona in 1472, and which was the first fruit of the press in that city. The printer "Johannes", lays emphasis, in the colophon, on the fact that he was the first typographer of his native city[1]. He had ample reason to look upon his work with pride. It is a masterpiece of printing; its Roman types, harmonious if not absolutely correct in form, are impressed with beautiful regularity upon paper of magnificent strength and thickness; and the woodcuts which adorn the pages are not the least of its merits.

The cuts are for the most part mere professional delineations of military engines; but the designs are so clear, and the lines drawn with such a bold and firm hand, that they strongly remind us of Lionardo's masterly sketches of similar objects. There is equally high quality in the occasional human figures of warriors in armour and the like, and in the figures of the animals pulling the waggons and chariots. The engraver's work, also, is of such perfect execution that the original drawing can have lost nothing of its merit in his hands. The difficulties with which the old system of cutting the block lengthwise had to contend, in the reproduction of simple

[1] Valturio (Roberto): De Re Militari. At the end: Johannes ex uerona oriundus: Nicolai cyrugie medici filius. Artis impressorie magister hunc de re militari librum elegantissimum litteris et figuratis signis sua in patria primus impressit. An. MCCCCLXXII. Folio. (Hain, 15847).

straight lines, seem to have had no existence for the artists who worked on the Valturio. The lines fall everywhere exactly into their true perspective; the corners form correct angles sharply and clearly drawn. When we reflect upon the position which the technique of wood-engraving occupied in all countries about the year 1472, we must recognise perforce that this book is one of



From Valturio, de Re Militari. Verona, 1472.

the most noteworthy productions of an age astonishingly fertile in new inventions.

Roberto Valturio was the military instructor of Sigismondo Malatesta of Rimini, the prince to whom his work *de Re Militari* is dedicated; but it was not till eight years after his master's death (in 1464) that the book was printed.

The medallist Matteo de Pastis, like Vittore Pisano at an earlier date, was much employed at the art-loving court of Rimini;

and it was therefore not unnatural to ascribe to him the designs in Valturio's Art of War, particularly as their drawing is quite in accordance with the style of a medal-engraver, who is accustomed to accentuate his figures by strong and sharp outlines. There is no authentic information to shew that Matteo de Pastis was actually the author of those woodcuts. It is assumed as a fact by Maffei in his *Verona illustrata;* but he adduces no authority for the statement.

Valturio's work played an important part in the military literature of the age; leading the way to a number of new editions, adaptations, and translations. In Verona itself, in 1483, but not in the same printing-house as the original, the work was brought out again, with very inferior woodcuts, in two simultaneous issues, Latin and Italian (Hain, 15848-49). The cuts are much more coarsely executed, but are for the most part free copies of the originals, drawn with a better knowledge of pictorial effect.

In an Æsop printed at Verona in 1479, we find woodcuts closely akin to those of the first Valturio[1]. The text of the fables is the popular metrical version by Accio Zucco, referred to on a preceding page. As a production of typography, this work is far behind the luxurious elegance of the Valturio; its illustrations also are not quite equal to those in the former book. Chiefly in plain rough outline, relieved occasionally by heavy masses of black shade, they have nevertheless the spirit and charm of drawings; and, while quite devoid of rudeness or negligence, there is frequently an intentional sketchiness in these designs which harmonises with the light and lively humour of the composition. The forms and movements of the animals, even the expression in their looks, are pourtrayed with a sure touch, in a few telling strokes. There must have been extraordinary merit in the designs from which so much spirit and vivacity have been preserved in transmission through the woodblock.

Of the special characteristics of the Veronese school, hardly any distinct feature can be traced, even in the delineation of the

[1] Zucco (Accio) Fabulæ Æsopi. *Folio 1 recto:* |S' Api chio son Esopo Da Gioanni aluise e da compagni sui | con diligentia bene impresso fui. *Folio 2 recto:* Accii Zuchi Summa Campaneae Veronensis . . . in Aesopi Fabulas Interpretatio . . . etc.

human figure; but the affinity which we have mentioned as existing between the Valturio and the Æsop woodcuts is obvious and undeniable. It is especially shown in the manner in which horses and oxen are designed in the Æsop (Fables XXXII and XL),



From the Aesop. Verona, 1479. The Fable of the Daw in borrowed feathers.

in which they are precisely similar to the animals drawing the war-chariots in the Valturio. That the illustrations in both works emanated from the one hand, is very likely; especially as the two books appear to have been printed at the same press. The types in the Æsop are identical with those of the Valturio; but, as might

be expected after seven years' usage, they are worn and blunt and blurred in the former. We need scarcely hesitate so assume that "Johannes ex Verona", who printed the Valturio, was the same personage as "Giovanni Alvise" who produced the Æsop.



From the Aesop. Verona, 1479. The Fable of the Ass and the lapdog.

If it were Matteo de Pastis who made the drawings for the Art of War, it was likewise he who illustrated the Fable-book. The designs in the latter have a plastic clearness and sharpness which are not unworthy of a medallist's art. Unfortunately, we are as yet unacquainted with the existence of any authentic original

drawing by Matteo, which alone would enable us to form a judgment on the subject. If any such drawings are extant, they are buried and undistinguishable now in the mass of anonymous Quattrocento work; but we need not despair of some fortunate accident which may some day enlighten our research. It was long before the world discovered Vittore Pisano's hand; yet we can now recognise several hundreds of his drawings, of which the Louvre alone possesses a large volume-full.

A certain family-likeness appears occasionally between the animal-figures of Vittore Pisano, and those in the woodcuts of the Veronese Æsop. Whoever was the designer of the latter illustrations, he must have been an artist of no inconsiderable rank. We reproduce here in facsimile two of the woodcuts in the Æsop.

Besides the designs in the Valturio and the 1479 Æsop, we do not know any wood-engravings of the fifteenth century which can be referred with certainty to Veronese origin[1]. Separate prints, published at the beginning of the sixteenth century, shew that the art was not disused in Verona, but was making some progress under the influence of the local school of painting.

The further developement, however, of the particular style of woodcut art which made its appearance in the Valturio and the 1479 Æsop, took place, not at Verona, but in Venice. Few as those primitive Veronese productions are, they possess, beyond their own intrinsic worth, a special importance in having served probably as the models followed by the wood-engravers of Venice. The method of outline-drawing — one, which is so characteristic of the Venetian school, and which was subsequently carried to such perfection in its new home, — seems to have been immediately derived from the example of the illustrations published at Verona between 1472 and 1479. But it was long before the wood-

[1] In the book — "Il Libro degli Huomini famosi cōpillato per lo Inclito Poeta Miser Francisco Petrarca" . . . *At the end:* "Antiquarius istud aere Felix Impressit: fuit Innocens Ziletus Adiutor sociusque" . . . Verona, 1476. Folio. — there is, at the heading of each chapter, a simple ornament of frieze-work, with an empty space in the midst destined to receive a painted portrait. The printer of the work, "Felix Antiquarius", was Felice Feliciano, who undertook so many things, and who in this volume made his one typographical essay.

engravers in Venice were able to produce work that could be compared with the spirited and genial art of Verona. The last decade of the century had been reached before their efforts exhibited anything like the freedom and elegance of the Veronese designs.

In Venice, as in the rest of Italy, there seems to have been no profession or guild of wood-engravers before the last quarter of the fifteenth century, nor even any body of metal-engravers, to whom the printers could, at need, address themselves (as at Florence and Milan) for the purpose of procuring illustrations; in case they felt disinclined to follow the example of Agostino Carnerio at Ferrara, who left blank spaces in his edition of Hyginus to be filled in with pictures by hand.

"Primus in Adriaca formis impressit aënis
Urbe libros Spira genitus de stirpe Iohannes"

— thus proudly runs the colophon of the first book printed in Venice by John of Speyer, namely Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares*. It appeared in 1469, and in the same year "Magister Iohannes" obtained from the senate a privilege giving him five years' monopoly of the new craft, and forbidding all others to print books in Venice, or to sell in that city books printed elsewhere. He derived small benefit from this valuable concession; for he died almost immediately. From that moment an unbroken succession of foreign typographers began to flow into Venice, and the printing-trade was soon carried to its highest state of developement. First after John of Speyer came his brother Wendelin, then Christopher Valdarfer, and next the Frenchman Nicolas Jenson.

Jenson had been an engraver of coin-dies for the mint, before he turned his attention to the new business of typography; and it was probably his experience in the former vocation which rendered him so capable in the art of type-cutting. His founts of Roman letters not only emulated those of John and Wendelin of Speyer, but easily surpassed them in regularity and beauty. They are indeed masterpieces of typographical achievement, permanent models for imitation, which have remained unequalled down to the present day. It is therefore all the more remarkable that a new fashion arose in Venice in 1475, by which the *antica* or Roman type,

based upon ancient classical forms, although it had prevailed during the ten years since the introduction of printing, was rejected, and a sort of Gothic letter, usually styled *moderna*, or *forma moderna*, was adopted with sudden and enthusiastic favour. These characters, although regarded as new, were in reality nothing more than an adaptation of the forms of ordinary book-writing in the fourteenth century. The only novelty consisted in the tasteful selection of a uniform and harmonious type, in the rounding of the edges, and the avoidance of the spikiness and angularity which marked French and Burgundian calligraphy in the fifteenth century.

Jenson is looked upon as the inventor of the Venetian-Gothic, but this is only correct in so far as he adapted and improved existing letter-forms, a task upon which his skill had been exercised previously in Germany, as it was now in Italy. He may have availed himself to some extent of the large, rounded, monumental characters, in which it had been customary, since the end of the fourteenth century, to write the text of the Antiphonaries and other choral-books used in the Italian churches.

It was said by one of his contemporaries that the types of Nicolas Jenson were plainer, clearer, and more suited to aged eyes, than the old classical letter-forms ("apertiores, clarioresque et senilibus oculis commodiores"). Printers who used the Gothic character were in the habit of recommending their books, expressly on account of the attractiveness of the letters ("jucundissimo litterarum charactere"). Of Johann of Seligenstadt, it was asserted by the author of one of the books which he printed in Gothic, at Venice, that the divine elegance of his types gave him an easy preeminence over all other typographers ("divo imprimendi charactere facile superat omnes").

The Gothic type was capable of containing more matter in a given space, than the Roman. It was, as we should now describe it, more "compact". This was the reason which Jenson himself alleged, for printing Gregory IX's *Decretalia* in that mode. ("Quia fortasse fuere nonnulli qui libenter et volunt et cupiunt in breviori volumine ac charactere parvo hoc opus habere et tenere".) But if outward and practical reasons had their share in bringing about the adoption of the Gothic type, they were not alone suffi-

cient, and we may conjecture that some kind of reaction against the classical tendencies of the Renaissance-movement lent its aid to the new fashion amongst the printers. At least, this was not improbably the case at Venice. It is, of course, a matter for discussion whether we should regard the change of fashion in typography as an isolated phenomenon, or as really betokening a temporary revulsion against the antique spirit of the time.

The Gothicising movement is of no little interest in the discussion of our subject; as it served to promote wood-engraving. The *moderna* types are not only in themselves of a somewhat ornate character; but also combine with decorative initials, ornamental borders, vignettes, and prints, infinitely better than the severe *antiqua*, or Roman type which is unsuited to accessory embellishment. Even the calligraphers, and the still surviving book-scribes, were affected by the same sentiment. They made use of the *moderna* characters chiefly in those manuscripts which it was intended to beautify with miniatures. A remarkable example of the kind is to be found in the Berlin Museum Print-room, in the magnificent Missal written for Giulio de' Medici (afterwards Pope Clement VII.) by the renowned calligrapher Ludovico Vicentino, and finished in 1520.

Little use was made of woodcuts for the ornamentation of books, at Venice, during the ten years which followed the introduction of printing in 1469. It was reserved for the miniator to decorate single copies of books with painted initials, borders, and other embellishments, according to the taste of the buyer and the price of the copy. Although mere printed volumes were not so carefully and sumptuously adorned as the vellum manuscripts, at least the first page was beautified with a rich border, in which the escutcheon of the purchaser was occasionally inserted. In the books of Jenson and other early printers, the chapter-initials were usually added by handwork, and painted red and blue. It was more rarely that the whole volume was decorated with miniatures.

Although the men who performed work of this kind for the printers could hardly have belonged to the better class of such artists; yet it furnished a desirable source of income to the miniaturists, at a time when the new art was undermining their very

existence. The further developement of wood-engraving completely superseded before long all the demand for their labour; especially since it was not the custom in Italy, — as it was in Germany during the fifteenth century and even later, — to colour the woodcuts in books.

The first printer in Venice who made use of wood-engraving as an accessory of typography was Erhard Ratdolt of Augsburg. He carried on his business in that city, between 1476 and 1480, with the help of two assistants, or partners — "Bernardus Pictor Augustaneus" and Peter Loslein of Langenzan (Langenzenn in Bavaria); and afterwards alone, from 1480 to 1486. In the latter year, he returned to his native city, and flourished there as one of the best masters of his craft till 1516.

As a printer, even during his career at Venice, Ratdolt is a representative of the German-Gothic school, of which we have spoken in the earlier part of this treatise.

The first dated book which issued from his press is likewise the first Venetian impression containing woodcut ornamentation (if we exclude the mere printer's-mark which Jenson made use of). It is an edition, published in 1476, of the Calendar of Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller of Königsberg), a work frequently printed in that age. The first page exhibits a charming decorative design of wreathing foliage growing out of two vases, conceived in the Italian manner, and finely executed in simple outline. Further on, in the text, there are some very neat mathematical diagrams. Next to the Valturio illustrations, these are, without doubt, technically the best woodcuts of the time. An able draughtsman, and an engraver of no less expertness, must have combined to produce such a result. The man who cut the block was possibly one of the Germans whom Ratdolt took with him to Venice.

In Ratdolt's workshop, there was evidently a strong tendency to the use of woodcuts, notwithstanding the circumstance that the class of books peculiar to his press — mathematical and astronomical treatises, and the current scholastic divinity — yielded few opportunities for artistic decoration. He was therefore limited, in the display of his resources, to the creation of decorative initials and border-ornaments; but this alone was sufficient to stamp him

as the actual founder of the system of book-illustration which became so popular and so highly-cultivated in Venice. The border-work, which sometimes runs down one side of the page only, and sometimes frames it on both sides, is usually a white pattern on a black ground. Occasionally we notice that his ornamental designs were directly copied from the pages of mediæval manuscripts, and are not without some infusion of that Oriental style which is often seen in Venetian art.

There is another group of books printed by Ratdolt, in which the illustrations are mean and worthless, completely Germanic in style, and nowise different from the common woodcuts produced in Augsburg at the same time. This is particularly the case with what he published after 1480, and may be instanced in his *Fasciculus Temporum* of that year (Hain, 6928) and his Hyginus of 1482 (Hain, 9062).

The first of those two books was published in more than twenty different editions at various places, before 1500. It is a compendious universal Chronicle, arranged in the form of Annals, by the Carthusian monk, Werner Rolewink; and was usually illustrated with small conventional woodcuts of the most noteworthy events and places, as a help to the reader's memory. In all the editions, these cuts are very much alike and wholly inartistic. Ratdolt's Venetian impression differs in no way from the rest; and his work in the astronomical poem of Hyginus is equally bad.

From 1480 to the end of his career, Ratdolt's name appears alone in the colophons of his books. It is perhaps to the dissolution of partnership with Bernhard Pictor and Peter Loslein, that we should ascribe the artistic deterioration of his press.

Ratdolt made use of polychrome woodcuts (that is, impressions in various colours in a single illustration, obtained by working two or more woodblocks) earlier than any other printer throughout Italy. In some of his astronomical publications, the figures are printed in two colours, and his own typographical device is usually impressed in red and black. This is a shield bearing the effigy of Mercury, standing upright with the caduceus in his hand. The nude figure clutching the twisted snakes is only to be identified with the antique god, after a comparison with the contemporary

German designs representing the planets, — as, for instance, the Mercury in the block-book *Planetenbuch* of 1468.

The Mercury and caduceus device was also used by a man who worked at Venice as painter, copper-engraver, designer of woodcuts (and perhaps also wood-engraver); namely, Jacob Walch, or Jacopo de' Barbari — of whom we shall have to treat further on. Can it be that he was in some way connected with Ratdolt, and that he adopted the printer's Mercury-mark, when the latter had given up his establishment in Venice? Such a conjecture would not be at variance with the chronology, but we do not seek to suggest here anything beyond its mere possibility.

About the time of which we have been speaking, or soon afterwards, other Venetian presses followed Ratdolt's example in the practice of printing in various colours; and the first place after him belongs to Johann Hamman, "dictus Herzog", of Landau. In a work on the degrees of consanguinity, published by him in 1490[1], we find a large genealogical tree which occupies two folio pages, and which is represented, like the well-known tree of Jesse, as growing out of a recumbent human figure. The man's form, and especially his head, are drawn with much vigour; and the entire picture, notwithstanding the uncongenial nature of the subject, is executed with no small artistic taste. The figure is printed in brown ink, the leaves in green, and the inscriptions in red.[2]

In those, and other similar essays which appeared about that time, the essential principle of colour-printing — *chiaroscuro*[3] — is found fully embodied. The further developement of the technique, which took place in Germany and Italy at the beginning

[1] Montibus (Johannes Crispus de) . Repetitio tit. institutionum de heredibus . . . etc. *At the end:* Impressum Venetiis impensis atque diligentiori cura Johannis hamman de Landoia Alemani dicti Herzog. 1490. Folio. (Hain, 11607.)

[2] The sheet on which the foregoing description is based is preserved in the Berlin Print-room. In a different copy which I have seen for sale, the tree was printed entirely in black.

[3] In the 1457 Psalter of Fust and Schoeffer, the large initials are printed very skilfully in two colours, red and blue; but the process used was quite unconnected with that of the real *chiaroscuro*. The peculiarity of the latter method is, that the various colours are impressed from different woodblocks in succession, and the sheet must therefore pass through the press as many times as there are colours to produce. In the colour-printing used by Fust and Schoeffer, both

of the sixteenth century, was probably in close relation to those earlier attempts, and would therefore need to be looked upon as the culminating perfection of a process, the essential features of which had long been known.

The invention of chiaroscuro is ascribed by tradition to Ugo da Carpi, a wood-engraver who was at work in Venice about the



From the Crispus de Montibus "Repetitio etc." Venice, 1490.

beginning of the sixteenth century. This is probably true, in so far as he may have introduced further developements in the practice of colour-printing with several blocks, which still survived in Venice;

of the colours were stamped at once in a single impression. The different blocks required for each initial were separately tinted with their proper colours, and then locked together in their places in the *form*. The method by which the Psalter was executed merely allowed of the impression of the different colours side by side, but not of their mingling or partial overlaying; and would never, by itself, have led to the artistic *chiaroscuro*.

especially after the production of coloured woodcuts by Burgkmair and Cranach, in Germany, had given fresh stimulus to a more artistic cultivation of that method.

Just as the Nuremberg Chronicle of the humanist Hartmann Schedel, published in 1493, afforded to wood-engraving the earliest opportunity of displaying its multifarious capabilities, and as the elevation of this craft to the standard of a fine art in Nuremberg may be said to date from the production of that grand achievement of Koburger's press; so, in Venice likewise, a general Chronicle was the first work of magnitude in which woodcuts were applied to the illustration of secular historical literature.

The Latin Chronicle of Johannes Philippus Foresti, an Augustinian monk from Bergamo, usually named "Bergomensis", (born in 1434) was first published with woodcuts in 1486 (Hain, 2807); two editions, not illustrated, having already appeared, one at Venice in 1483 (Hain, 2805) and the other, a sort of reissue, at Brescia in 1485 (Hain, 2806).

The book is a meritorious compilation, intended to serve for the correction and completion of all previous historical works, and was therefore named by its author *Supplementum Chronicarum*. He spent no little labour in making it authentic, and we find that each successive edition received alterations and improvements from his hand. The same studious care was extended to the illustrations. The printer was Bernardino de Benalis, a Bergamese like the author, and of high repute for the activity of his press.

Like Schedel's Chronicle — of which indeed it was the immediate prototype, — the *Supplementum* contains views of the chief cities of the world, with some biblical pictures from the Old Testament at the beginning. These, in the edition of 1486, are marked by a fairly good quality of design, but the execution is poor and clumsy. In later editions, better cuts were substituted. The views of cities, which, at their first appearance, were utterly inartistic, were similarly much improved in successive issues. They possess, for us, a very particular interest, from the circumstance that some of them were manifestly copied from separate prints, like the view of Florence which we have already described; and also because

they confirm the probability that many such pictures of various Italian cities were in existence before 1500.

For the most part, however, the views in the *Supplementum* are mere fancy sketches; or perhaps it were more correct to say that they are merely conventional symbols, placed at the chapter-headings for the purpose of arousing the attention of the reader, and equivalent to some such phrase as "Lo! here we speak of a remarkable city". The design is usually nothing more than a couple of towers, surrounded by a wall, or set upon a sea-shore; and frequently, as in the Nuremberg Chronicle, a single wood-block is made to serve for the picture of several different towns.

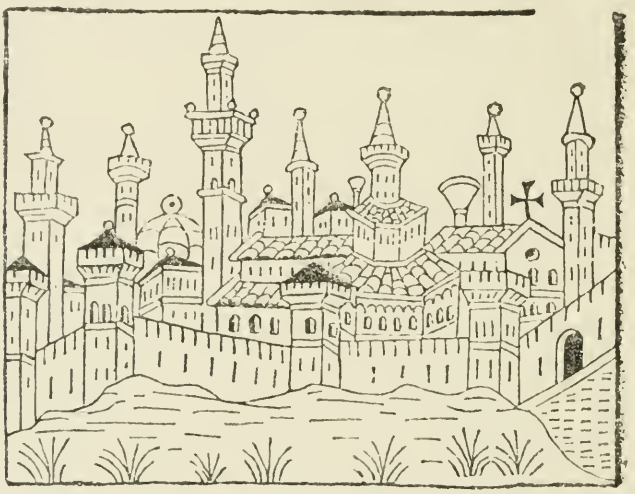
The views of Venice and of Genoa, in the *Supplementum* of 1486, form exceptions to the preceding rule. That of Genoa is larger and better than the others, and in the disposition of the harbour and the plan of the city that lies behind, we detect an amount of fidelity to nature that cannot be denied. Curious to say, the same woodcut is used to represent Rome, a few pages afterwards! Venice is exhibited in a thoroughly primitive view of the ducal palace, in which the two columns on the Piazzetta, bearing the lion of St. Mark and the statue of St. George, are placed erroneously to the right, instead of to the left, of the palace. This striking blunder arose from the fact that the woodcut in question, although it represents the chief glory of Venetian architecture, and was engraved in Venice itself, was neither drawn from nature, nor even from recollection; but was merely copied in counterpart from a small and poor design in the *Fasciculus Temporum* of 1481 (Venice, Ratdolt). It is a curious and significant example of the way in which the old illustrators did their work.

Much superior are the woodcuts in the edition of the *Supplementum* printed in 1490, which was next in succession to that of 1486. In the interval, the author had rewritten a good deal of his text, and he now brought the narrative down to date; not failing, at the same time, to make use of the better and more abundant material for its artistic illustration, which was at his command.

It is not, by any means, to be supposed that artists were specially commissioned to design views of cities for the Chronicle. Circumstantial work of that kind would not have been in harmony

with the custom of the illustrators. Direct transcripts from nature were not in their way of business; everything was done in the conventional style of the workshop. Even when their originals lay so close to them as, for instance, the Doge's palace, they took in preference a defective woodcut of it as their model; in fact, they would use nothing but ready-made material.

To show the relation between the views of Florence which appear in the 1486 and 1490 editions of the *Supplementum*, we



The view of Florence in the "Supplementum Chronicarum" of 1486.

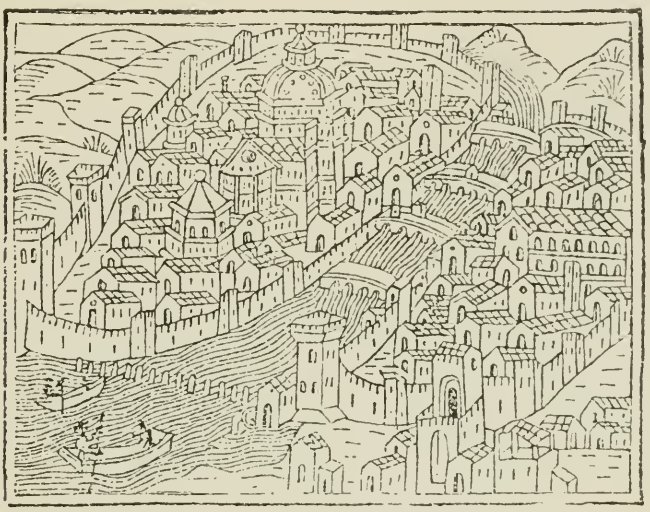
give, on this and the opposite page, facsimiles of the small woodcuts representing Florence in both of those editions. This will make the matter clearer.

Venice is represented, in the issue of 1490, with perfect correctness, and on a relatively large scale, by a well-executed view of the Doge's palace and the Piazzetta. For this, the original was, according to our judgment, found in the large panoramic prospect which appeared in the *Peregrinationes* of Bernhard von Breydenbach, published at Mentz in 1486.

In the chapter on Verona, there was substituted, for the fancy sketch of the 1486 *Supplementum*, a new and superior design, in

which the amphitheatre, and the situation of the buildings around it, are correctly delineated. Of the original of this view we have at present no knowledge.

Especially remarkable is the view of Rome, which made its appearance for the first time in the edition of 1490. In that of 1486, as already mentioned, a repetition of the Genoa woodcut was made to serve for Rome; but in 1490, a design was used which conveyed an actual copy from nature. The woodcut of



The view of Florence in the "Supplementum Chronicarum" from 1490.

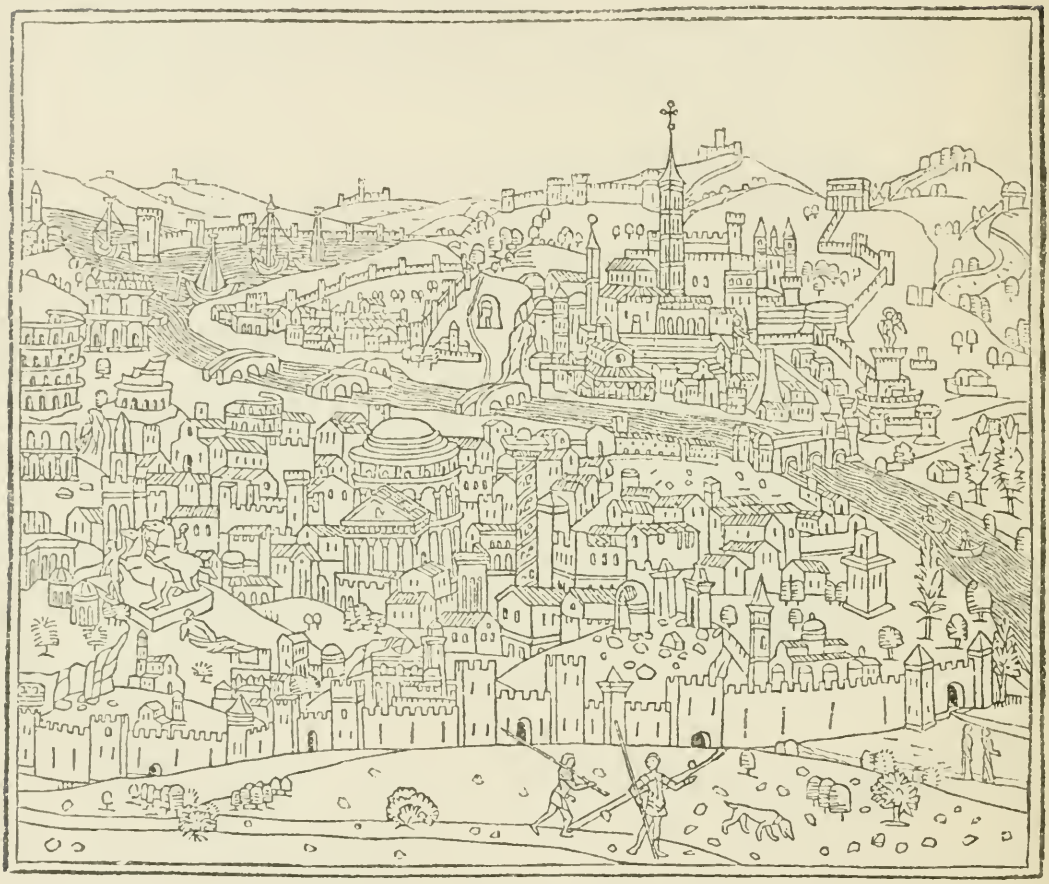
Rome in the 1490 edition, is, it may be observed, the oldest view of that city, within our knowledge.

In De' Rossi's large work on the plans and views of Rome, the above mentioned design of 1490 is not alluded to: it seems to have escaped the author's notice.[1]

The woodcut in Hartman Schedel's Chronicle is cited by De' Rossi as the earliest pictorial representation of the city. According to his opinion, it was derived from an older design which has not indeed survived, but of which a later copy, in the form of a large

[1] Rossi (G. B. de) Piante icnografiche e prospettive di Roma anteriori al secolo XVI. Roma, 1879. 4to and Folio.

tempera painting, is preserved in the Mantua Museum. This is a panorama, over two metres in length, and about one metre in height; and appears, from a partly defaced inscription upon it, to be the work of Solanzio Rusconi, an unknown Mantuan artist. Of



The view of Rome in the "Supplementum Chronicarum" of 1490.

the date of the painting, we only know that it cannot have been executed before 1534, as it exhibits the statues of SS. Peter and Paul, which were erected in that year on the parapet of the bridge of Sant' Angelo, on the left bank of the river. The view in the Nuremberg Chronicle shows the bridge in its older state, with two

small cupolated buildings on the spot which was afterwards occupied by the statues. It is similarly given in the woodcut of the *Supplementum*.

De' Rossi inclines apparently to the opinion that the Mantuan picture was copied from an older design, and that the introduction of the change which had been effected in the meanwhile with regard to the bridge, is due to the copyist; while the artists of the Nuremberg Chronicle took the earlier picture for their model, or, to speak more correctly, selected a portion of the original panorama. Thus, the Nuremberg woodcut exhibits only the district which extends from the Porta del Popolo to the Colosseum, while Rusconi's picture gives the entire space comprised within the walls of the city, and portion of the Campagna beyond them. The designer of the original is supposed by De' Rossi to have been identical with the man who, under the pseudonym of "Prospettivo Milanese Depictore", composed in the fifteenth century a poem upon Rome.[1]

The illustration in the Nuremberg Chronicle, and that in the *Supplementum*, contain precisely the same portion of the city, and are taken from the same point of view. It appears certain that they were copied from an identical original. The difference in details is of no essential importance, considering the loose and careless manner in which those cuts were executed, and however unlike they may seem in their general aspect. The existence of the print in the *Supplementum* serves to fix the date of the lost original design as earlier than 1490. We may however conjecture that it was no painting which furnished that original. The model which was followed in the Nuremberg and the *Supplementum* illustrations, must assuredly have been a woodcut, or a copper-engraving, since works of painting are usually unique, and the dozen or so of book-

[1] The only known copy of the early undated edition of this poem, is in the Monte Cassino library. — See Govi (Gilberto) Atti della Reale Accademia de' Lincei, Tom. 3, Serie II, 1876. 4to. — From its type, it appears to have been printed at Milan, and was, in any case, a fifteenth century production. There is a woodcut at the beginning, of a naked human figure, drawing, with a compass, geometrical diagrams upon the earth, with a background formed by edifices of classical architecture. It is in outline, well designed and fairly well executed; and is also suggestive of Milanese origin. (Reproduced by Govi).

illustrators connected with the two Chronicles, would scarcely have busied themselves with any other material than what was easily attainable and easily manageable. Such a prospect of Rome, engraved either on copper or on wood, and presumably somewhat akin to the view of Florence described above, in its style and general correctness, would probably have embraced no larger extent of the city's plan than is given in the two Chronicles. The perfect agreement between these would thus be accounted for. Moreover, the picture at Mantua may have been only an enlarged later copy, or an amplification, of the print representing a portion of the city.



From the "Decretals". Venice, 1481.

If it be allowable to carry the hypothesis further, we might infer, from the numerous fine details of the view in the *Supplementum*, and even from the character of the cut in the Nuremberg Chronicle, that the original which they both followed, was, not a woodcut, but a copper-engraving. When we call to mind the masterly execution of the engraved maps published by Conrad Sweynheim and Arnold Buckinck, in the Latin Ptolemy of 1478, there can be little doubt that Rome at that time possessed artists thoroughly capable of producing a view of the city. It is possible that a copy of the old print still survives, by a lucky accident, in some neglected corner, and may yet be discovered and recognised. As the *Supplementum* of 1486 does not contain the genuine view of Rome which was inserted in the edition of 1490, we have fair reason to assume that the missing original (in this case as in that of the Florence illustration) was designed some time between those years.



The Triumph of Chastity from the Petrarch of Venice, 1488.

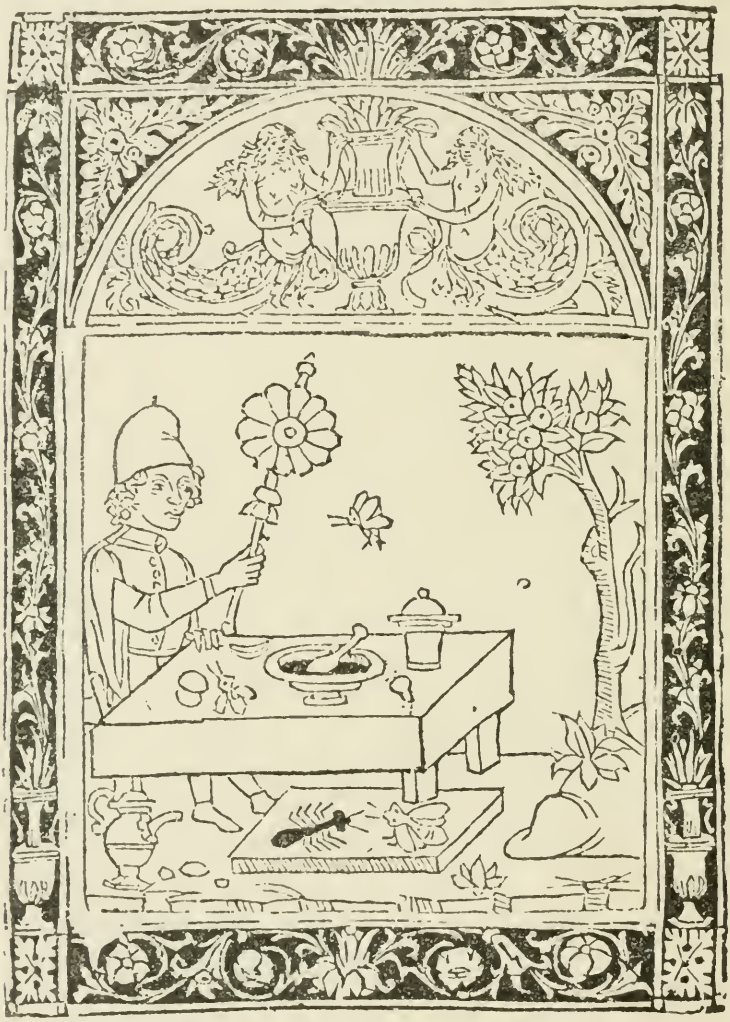
One of the earliest examples of pure outline illustration in the Veronese style, is found as a decorative accessory, where one would hardly expect anything of the kind, in the edition of Pope Innocent's Decretals, published at Venice in 1481. It is a sumptuous volume, printed by Johann of Seligenstadt in the *moderna* type which Jenson had invented (Hain, 9192). In the *registrum* which precedes the text, the typographer has inserted, for no visible reason, an allegorical figure bearing a lily in her hand; which we reproduce here as a specimen of Venetian outline work in its initial stage.

Of similar kind are the six illustrations in the *Triumphi* of Petrarch, printed in 1488 by Bernardino (Ricio) de Novara (Hain, 12770). They were evidently designed by an artist of ability; and there is no little skill in the manner in which they are accomodated to the narrow folio size of the book. The allegorical chariots, and the figures surrounding them, appear to be moving forward, obliquely, from the back-ground towards the right of the spectator, in natural and well-grouped pageantry. In its technical execution, however, the engraving is somewhat deficient in smoothness and finish; and we may conjecture that those cuts were imperfect reproductions of beautiful designs. The pictures are enclosed within ornamental borderings, conceived with much taste, and brought out in white upon a black-ground.

Somewhat different from the Petrarch illustrations, and from the usual style of Venetian work, are the woodcuts which we find in an Æsop, published in 1487 by Bernardo de Benalis — apparently the first illustrated work produced by that printer. The only extant copy known to us, now in the Berlin print-room, is deficient of the first leaf; but is complete in its text, which is the metrical version of Accio Zuccho.[1] It is a small quarto volume, containing sixty one woodcuts, which are free adaptations of the compositions in the Veronese Æsop. The Venetian designer, however, frequently borrowed from his original nothing more than the general motive of the subjects, and in other respects followed his own independent fancy.

[1] The colophon (on the obverse of folio *m* iii) runs thus: — "Impressum uenetiis per Bernardinum de Benalis Bergomensem anno domini MCCCCLXXXVIj die XX. Nouembriss." Folio *m (3) verso:* Reg. Folio *m (4):* finis. Folio *m* v blank.

The style of engraving is, to a large extent, cramped and angular; and the entire appearance of the work is that of a genuine chap-book.



From the Aesop. Venice, 1487. The fable of the fly and the ant.

Down to the close of the second last decade of the fifteenth century, — so far at least as may be judged from the illustrations in dated books — wood-engraving in Venice seems to have been

practised as an occasional mode of decoration only, not as a branch of systematic industrial art. From about 1489-90 onwards, it began to assume for the first time a definite character, and to take the attributes of a regular school, having its own distinct growth and individuality. The workshops had now acquired all the experience and technical skill which were necessary for success, and they drew to their service a number of practised designers,



From the Devote Meditazioni. Venice, 1489.

who knew how to enrich the limited expressiveness of the wood-block with something of the style and spirit of Venetian painting. This happy combination of talent soon led to a large and varied production of woodcuts.

It is worthy of remark, that the special beauty of typography, which consists in the elegance and regularity of the types, and in the perfect clearness of impression, no longer maintained the standard of excellence which had been established, twenty years earlier, by the first printers of Venice. In its place, we find the efforts of the typographers directed chiefly to the adornment of

their books with borders, initial-letters, and woodcuts; while the letter-press was more and more neglected, and lost all its former quality. The only worthy successor to Jenson, and to John and Windelin of Speyer, the only one at least who sought to render his books typographically excellent by means of finely-cut type, symmetrical composition, and careful press-work, was Aldus Manutius. His career as a printer began about 1493.

Of the vast number of books illustrated with woodcuts, which the Venetian presses produced in the short space of time between 1490 and 1500, we can here mention but a few.

Two different kinds of illustration may be distinguished. The one embraces small vignettes, inserted within the text, and intended originally (as we believe), to serve as reminders or signals for the guidance of the reader. The other consists of large woodcuts, demanding attention for their own merits, and fulfilling the special purpose of artistic decoration.

The fashion of illustrating books with a great number of woodcuts, frequently of extremely small dimensions, appears to have originated in Venice; and there is a group of Venetian works which are signalised in that way. Vignette-illustration was adopted in Germany from the practice of the Venetians; and was cultivated with success by the younger Holbein, by Hans Sebald Beham, and by Albrecht Altdorffer. At a later date it was completely monopolised in Lyons, by Bernard Salomon and his imitators. The Venetian artists were the fore-runners, and perhaps even the direct models, of the "little masters" of Germany and France.

The series of those vignette-illustrations was opened by a small book, published in 1489, and intitled *Devote Meditazioni sopra la Passione del N. S.*[1] It is a small quarto volume, decorated with eleven woodcuts, clearly and sharply designed, and cut upon the block with considerable freedom and finish. They

[1] "Devote Meditazione sopra la Passione del nostro Signore cavate & fundate originalmente sopra sancto Bonaventura cardinale del ordine minore sopra Nicola de Lira etiamdio sopra altri dottori & predicatori approvati, stampato in Venetia per Matheo di codeca da Parma nel MCCCCLXXXIX a di XXVII di februario." The printer was "Mattheo di co de ca", that is, Matteo di Capo di Casa, of Parma. (See Fossi, Catalogus II, column 180.)

represent successive scenes in the history of the Passion, and are quite Venetian in style, and in the manner of their composition. The reproduction which we give here, of one of the woodcuts, will enable the reader to form an idea of the particular mode in which the originals are treated. The text was a very popular abridgment of the *Meditationes* of St. Bonaventure. The same woodblocks were used in a re-issue of the book, printed in the following year (1490); and also, according to the Duc de Rivoli, in six other successive editions, down to 1494, four of which appeared in the course of the year 1492.[1]

In a different edition of the *Meditazioni*, which bears no date, but was printed by Bernardino Benali, in partnership with Matteo di Parma, about 1490, we find new illustrations of somewhat larger dimensions, borrowed, as compositions, directly from the 1489 woodcuts, of which they are copies, more or less free: but without the regularity and harmony which mark the drawing of the originals.[2]

There was also published in 1489, an edition of Nicolaus de Lyra's *Postilla*, which contains thirty eight small vignettes of biblical subjects, apparently by the same artists as the contemporaneous cuts in the *Meditazioni*. The *Postilla* was the immediate precursor of a work which must be described as one of the most important, and most richly illustrated, of the Venetian vignette-books. We refer to the first edition of the Italian Bible of Nicola de Malermi,[3] printed in 1490 by Giovanni Ragazzo for the publishing house of Lucantonio da Giunta (Hain, 3156). It is illustrated throughout with small woodcuts, chiefly intended, no doubt, to assist the reader's memory in retaining the scriptural names, and to enable him to find any desired passage without difficulty. This was a matter of no small convenience and usefulness in a vernacular Bible, destined wholly for the uninstructed classes of

[1] «A propos d'un livre à figures Vénitien de la fin du XV^e Siècle» — Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1886.

[2] See the Duc de Rivoli's paper, cited above. We are unable to agree with this writer's opinion that the imitations in the undated edition, printed by Benali and Matteo, are of higher artistic quality than the woodcuts in the original edition of 1489.

[3] A monk of San Michele at Murano, born about 1430. A different Italian Bible had already been printed, at Venice in 1471.

the people. In spite of the narrow limits to which his efforts were confined, the designer succeeded in producing a series of pictures full of charm and grace. It is true that the engraver failed, in several instances, to give an adequate rendering of the



From the Malermi Bible. Venice, 1490. Judith, Cap. X.

undoubtedly delicate art of the drawings; especially when dealing with the faces of the figures. These were so fine and minute as to baffle his skill, and the expression is frequently lost or perverted.



From the Malermi Bible. Maccabees, I, Cap. X.

Many of the cuts are stiff and angular, bad and good examples are found in alternation; but, on the whole, we must regard the execution of the engravings as a decided technical success.

Several of the illustrations are marked with a small "b" — a signature which (so far as we know at present) appears here

for the first time, and which is to be met, again and again afterwards, during more than a century from the date of the Malermi Bible, upon outline-woodcuts produced in Venice.

Professor Thode[1] was the first writer who drew attention



From the Malermi Bible. Hosea, Cap. I.

to the circumstance that the woodcuts of the Malermi Bible are copies of those in the Cologne German Bible of 1480. The Cologne woodblocks were, as every one knows, used again in Koburger's



From the Malermi Bible. Psalm XCVII.

Nuremberg Bible of 1483. There can be no doubt that the Italian artist had the German woodcuts before him, when he was drawing the illustrations of the Malermi Bible. He copied them indeed, but with the greatest freedom; reducing the dimensions and

[1] *Jahrbuch der Preuss. Kunstsammlungen*, Vol. III, p. 117.

altering the positions, making groups where there had been isolated figures, dividing groups into their separate elements, changing the costumes in accordance with Italian fashion. In short, he simply used the Cologne illustrations as a convenient groundwork for his own designs, adopting certainly nothing beyond the pictorial subject of each. Nor did he allow the narrow and commonplace character of those Gothic models to affect his own artistic fancy; as we can easily judge from the freedom and elegance of his



From the Dante.
Venice, 1491, March-Edition; Inferno VIII.

work. Moreover, by far the larger proportion of these compositions was entirely new, since there are only a hundred and ten illustrations in the Cologne Bible (— a hundred and seven in Koburger's Bible —); while the Malermi Bible, if we include a few repetitions, contains three hundred and eighty three. And it is precisely amongst the new ones, that we find the most charming and graceful compositions of the entire series. — Nineteen of the Malermi woodcuts were adapted, with more or less variation, from the *Postilla* of Nicolaus de Lyra, above referred to.

Like the illuminated Bible-manuscripts of the miniaturists, the Malermi Bible includes, at the beginning, an illustration of full-

page size, representing the seven days of the Creation. It is framed within a pretty Renaissance border of architectonic ornament. The border is frequently met with in later works from Venetian presses; the vignettes themselves appear in other editions of the Bible, in 1492 and 1494 (Hain, 3157, 3158), and afterwards.

The attempt to produce an illustrated edition of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, was first made, as we have already observed,



From the Dante.
Venice, 1491, November-Edition; Inferno VIII.

by the Florentine printer, Nicolaus Lorenz, in 1481; but it was not a fortunate essay, as he did not succeed in procuring the designs for the entire poem. More successful in the result, but with smaller claim to artistic excellence, was a similar project, undertaken by Bonino de' Bonini, a printer who set up presses in various towns of Northern Italy, migrating in turns from one to the other. He achieved his purpose, and published an illustrated Dante at Brescia in 1487, in folio, with woodcuts of full-page size (Hain, 5948). The cuts are mere mechanical work, ill designed

and badly engraved. The journeyman who executed them, followed the designs of the Florentine edition of 1481, so far as the latter extended, that is, down to the nineteenth canto of the Inferno; for the remainder, his own plentiful lack of taste and skill supplied the models.

In 1491, a new illustrated edition of the Divina Commedia was published at Venice by the two partners, Bernardino Benali and Matteo da Parma. The woodcuts were in the form of small vignettes, one at the beginning of each canto. It is not unlikely that they were based upon good designs, but the tiny figures lost in the execution whatever merit they had possessed, and are deformed by clumsy angularities. The engraver had evidently not been trained to work within such narrow limits. The argument of each canto is certainly indicated by the illustrations; but nothing more than this could be expected under such restrictions of space. Of artistic power, there is naturally no manifestation whatever. Above the heads of the principal figures, the initials of their names were added, for the sake of identification. In this edition, likewise, the vignettes of the first twenty one cantos of the Inferno are, to some extent, reproductions of the prints in the Florentine Dante of 1481, and thus, indirectly, of Botticelli's drawings. Many of the vignettes bear the mark "b".

If we consider the quality of the woodcuts in those two books, namely, the Brescian Dante of 1487 and the Venetian Dante of 1491, we find it difficult to understand how the book-buyers could have been contented to accept such a kind of illustration, at a time when the taste for fine art had reached its highest developement; and why the printers should have ventured to insert in their books, engravings of such a mean character, assuredly not calculated to satisfy, in any respect, the mere popular desire for pictures and decoration. There can, however, be little doubt, that the same reason which we have already suggested as the motive for illustrating the "Biblia volgarizata", obtained here also. The cuts in the Dante appear to have been intended simply as landmarks for the reader, to guide him in the search for special lines or passages, and to fix in his memory the leading actions of the poem. If we take up any such illustrated Dante, and glance through it, we can con-

vince ourselves that the inserted woodcuts fulfil that purpose remarkably well, and keep us far better acquainted with our bearings, than any marginal notes, or running headlines, could do it. Thus, in the opinion of the present writer, the illustrations scattered through the Dantes, and other old books of similar kind, represent a dominant practical object, in view of which all artistic considerations were of comparatively minor importance. Pictorial representation was, at that time, highly esteemed as a means of imparting information; and this function of graphic art, still used and recognised in the fifteenth century, only fell into oblivion, with the change of ideas, at a later period.

The history of the Venetian editions of Dante teaches us how readily the printers of the fifteenth century snatched at opportunities of publishing anything which promised to become a lucrative speculation. The edition undertaken by Benali and Matteo da Parma, which, according to its colophon, was completed on the 3rd of March 1491, was followed, eight months later, by a reprint similarly illustrated, published by Pietro Cremonese, with the date of 27 November, 1491. The illustrations of the latter are somewhat better executed than the wretched woodcuts of the former, but the compositions in both are identical. It would seem, indeed, that the vignettes in each were drawn by the same man; but that he took a little more pains in designing the cuts for the later edition, and selected a cleverer and more practised workman to perform the engraving. At the beginning of the Inferno in Pietro Cremonese's edition, there is a fine large woodcut of full-page size. The "b" monogram is not found in the illustrations of that edition.

The opinion of the Duc de Rivoli (Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1886, p. 26) that the Dante of November 1491 was antecedent to that of March 3 in that year, is erroneous. It is based on the assumption that the year began with Easter, in the Middle-Ages; which is true, indeed, as regards France, but not as regards Venice, where the first day of the civil year was March 1. There is, besides, nothing unexampled in the fact that a later edition may be copied from an earlier one, and yet be essentially improved in the execution of its artistic adornment. Similar instances meet us in the various Venetian editions of the illustrated Æsop.

Vignette-woodcuts, like those of the Dantes and of the Malermi Bible, came immediately into vogue, and were largely used in other books published at Venice. Translations from the classics, editions of Boccaccio, and various collections of stories, are found illustrated thus.

A certain similarity of style in the treatment and conception of many of those little woodcuts, seems to indicate that a large portion of the designs for such vignettes must be ascribed to a single artist; — the man who sometimes marked his work with the "b" signature, and who was evidently one of the most active illustrators employed by the Venetian printers. In the various books in which his designs are found, and frequently also in different vignettes in a single book, we notice that the execution of the engravings is of very irregular quality. They are sometimes fine and of great excellence; but more often, the wood-engraver handled his knife with awkward inexpertness, and transmuted the flowing lines of the drawing into stiff and ungraceful angularities.

A large design within an ornamental border usually adorned the first page, and was executed, in most instances, with particular care. The practice of the miniaturists had been analogous, in the decoration of manuscripts.

We will now proceed to notice in detail a few of the books illustrated with vignette-woodcuts.[1]

The *Decameron*, or *Cento Novelle*, of Boccaccio, printed in 1492 by Gregorius de Gregoriis, contains a woodcut for every story. The designs are well and minutely drawn, and prettily composed; but somewhat hard and dry in execution. The woodcut on the title, which represents the gay company of the Decameron assembled in the garden, is a graceful picture of high life in Venice in the fifteenth century (Henri Delaborde, Gravure en Italie, Paris, 1882, p. 227).

The same printer, Gregorius, published, contemporaneously with his Boccaccio, an edition of the Novellino of Masuccio Salernitano

[1] It is perhaps not necessary to remind the reader that our purpose in this work is simply to take a general survey of Italian Wood-engraving in the fifteenth century, and that our enumeration of the books and prints which concern the subject, is intended to be by no means very extensive. The bibliography of early printing is still too imperfect to render such an undertaking feasible.

The vignettes which it contains are quite similar to those in the Boccaccio. The annexed reproduction is taken from a woodcut on the title of the book, which is framed within an architectonic border, and gives a picture of the author presenting his work to Hippolyta, Duchess of Calabria.

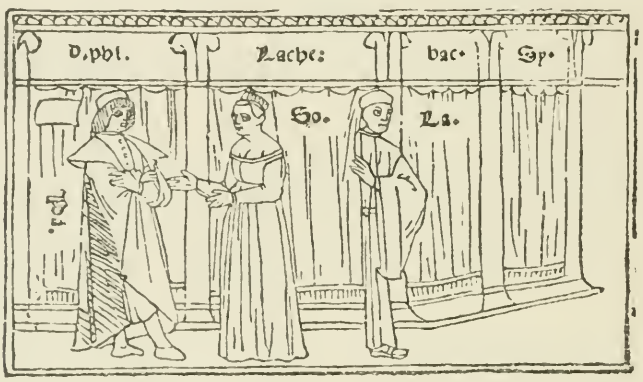


From Massuccio's "Novellino". Venice, 1492. The author presenting his book to the Duchess Hippolyta of Calabria.

A companion-volume to the two preceding works of Boccaccio and Masuccio, is found in the "Settanta Novelle" of Sabadino degli Arienti, printed likewise in Venice, by Zani da Portese, in 1503. The illustrations are similar to those in the other two books, but not quite of equal merit; the impressions, and the disposition of the figures, are less successful.

Translations of the ancient classics, illustrated with vignettes, ("volgare historiate") were published in numerous successive edi-

tions, until the woodblocks were completely worn out. This continual repetition proves the great popularity of such a mode of classical reading. The "Deche di Tito Livio volgare historiate" were printed for the first time by Giovanni of Vercelli (Zuan Vercellese) in 1493, for the publishing-house of Lucantonio da Giunta (Hain, 10149) Several of the vignettes bear the well known signature "b", while others exhibit a mark which appears here for the first time, and resembles a small F. The cuts are not quite so good as some in the Malermi Bible.



From the Terence of Venice, 1497. Hecyra Act IV.

The comedies of Terence were printed in 1497 by Lazarus de Suardis for Simon de Luere (Hain, 15429)

There were published, before 1500, some five illustrated editions of Terence, which appeared at various places in Germany and France. The woodcuts in these books form an attractive and interesting group, from the double point of view, of art and of culture, amongst the illustrated works of the fifteenth century. So far back as 1493, one edition had been printed by Trechsel in Lyons (Hain, 15424), the illustrations of which may claim to rank among the best examples of their kind which the time had produced. They were evidently designed by a man of talent, belonging actually to the French school, but influenced probably by the works of Martin Schongauer, or the Dutch artists. The

figures are coarse, but the attitudes and the faces are full of expression. The groups are extremely animated and life-like; all scenic accessories are omitted, except the drop-curtain in front of which the action takes place. The technical execution is unusually good, the blocks having been cut with a bold and vigorous hand. In 1498, Grüninger in Strassburg published an edition of Terence, the text of which had been critically revised by Sebastian Brant. This scholar is supposed to have also suggested the subjects and the compositions of the woodcuts. Compared with those in the Lyons book, the illustrations of the Strassburg Terence are childish and clumsy work.

The Terence printed at Lyons in 1493, was the prototype from which the cuts in the Venetian edition, four years later, were directly copied; just as the Cologne Bible had furnished the immediate model for the illustrations of the Malermi Bible. In the Terence, no less than in the latter book, the Venetian artist simply borrowed the subjects and the compositions from his precursor. The drawing, the execution, and the style of costume, were wholly remodelled according to the taste of Venetian art. In the originals, however, there is a characteristic strength and decision, which is missing in the Venetian work, charming and delicate as it is in many instances.

Two admirable outline-woodcuts, each occupying a full page, are found at the beginning of the book. The first represents Terence in the act of lecturing, at a kind of professorial desk, with Donatus, Accursius, and others of the chief Latinist grammarians, grouped around him. — The *motif* of this picture recurs frequently in the title-woodcuts of other books of the same period, exhibiting the authors as either lecturing to their pupils, or working at their own desks; and miniatures of similar character had also been customary in the illuminated manuscripts. — The second of the two large woodcuts is a view of the antique theatre, or rather of the auditorium as seen from the stage. We need not be surprised to observe that the audience consists of persons, such as might have been met with in the streets of Venice in the fifteenth century; and that the actors, whom we see from behind, wear a sort of costume usually appropriated to fools and jesters.

Although there is no mark, either upon the two large pictures, or the vignettes, in the Venetian Terence, we are inclined, nevertheless, to ascribe those designs to the artist who usually signed his work with a "b".

We observe occasionally, even in large woodcuts, that delicate, but rather attenuated, style of treatment, the fine-drawn lines of which are characteristic of Venetian vignettes. It is noticeable especially in the border-ornamentation, with which the initial pages of books, and of their principal sections, are decorated. Such borders were often used by the printers, even in works which contained no further artistic addition, or which, at the utmost, had but one or two woodcuts illustrating some special incident of the text. Some of the woodblocks from which the borders were printed, seem to have been in a continual state of migration. They appeared in many different books from the one press, and were transferred occasionally to other printing-houses as well; frequently remaining in use for ten and sometimes twenty years.

The marginal decoration, of which we have been speaking, usually takes the form of architectural columns or pilasters, light and graceful in structure, and richly embellished with friezes, ornaments, shields, and trophies. The first employment of this mode of decorative frame-work seems to have been nearly contemporaneous with that of the vignettes, to which it is closely akin in style. This remark is appositely illustrated in the Malermi Bible, and elsewhere. One of the earliest, and yet most charming, examples of the kind, is found in the Plutarch printed, in 1491, by Giovanni Ragazzo di Monteferrato (Hain, 13129). On a pediment, enclosing in the middle an empty escutcheon (intended to be filled with the armorial bearing of the owner), naked horsemen are blowing trumpets, and satyrs playing musical instruments. Outside the base of the pilasters, which are adorned with antique cameos containing busts, tritons are seen rearing trophies aloft upon long and slender poles. An ornamental frieze fills the entablature, which is surmounted by an arch similarly decorated; and on the cornices, right and left, the Roman eagle perches. From above, graceful festoons hang down to meet the trophies:

grotesque shields occupy the lower corners, and a pair of dolphins support the empty escutcheon.

The type of this decorative border recurs frequently elsewhere, with suitable modifications. The mode of adornment stands always



Theseus and the Minotaur from the "Plutarch". Venice 1491.

in distinct relation to the contents of the work thus embellished; that is, of course, the work for which it was originally intended, and in which it was used for the first time. As, however, the printers were in the habit of utilising, for a number of other books of their stock, any wood-block from which they had once

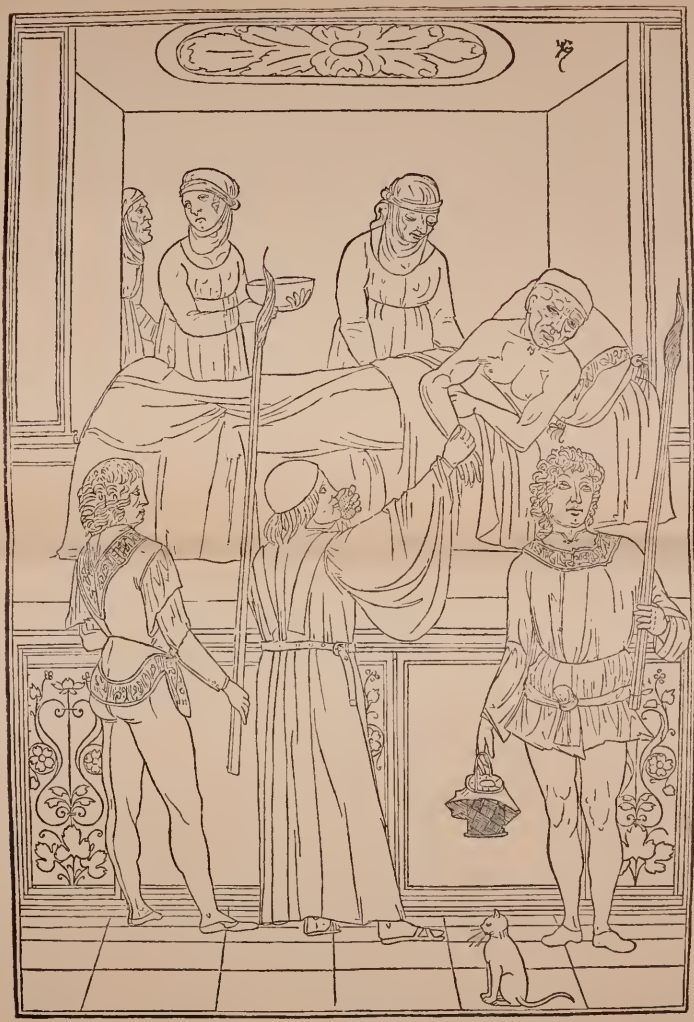
taken an impression, without regard to its circumstantial fitness, — illustrations of mythological subjects and Christian symbolism were brought together for the adornment of works to the text of which they were in no wise suitable.

Within the enclosing border of the first page, it was usual to find another design representing figures. In the Plutarch, a very fine woodcut occupies about half of the space within the border frame-work. This exhibits a picture of the combat between Theseus and the Minotaur, admirably designed and executed. It is quite in the manner of the unknown artist who designed the vignettes of the Malermi Bible, and is evidently from his hand. Indeed, it ranks among the best of his productions. The attitudes of the two combatants, and the conception of the subject, remind us to some extent of the work of Antonio Pollajuolo, in his known copper-engravings.

The ultimate destiny of this cut furnishes an example of the curious migrations of wood-blocks from one printing-press to another; and shows how unsafe it would sometimes be to reason as to the origin of such an engraving, from the imprint of the book in which it happened to be found. The "Theseus and Minotaur" of the Plutarch of 1491, meets us again at Forli in 1495, at the end of a little book ("Nicolaus Ferettus, De structura compositionis . . . ad componendas epistolas") printed by Hieronymo Medesano, "Parmensis". There is no imaginable connexion between the illustration and the text of the treatise; and it is therefore evident that the printer used it merely for the purpose of giving to the last leaf of his work a more elegant appearance. If we had been ignorant of the Venetian origin of the woodblock, we should readily have assumed that it was cut at Forli.[1]

A broader and coarser style of wood-engraving in outline, suitable for decorating books of larger size, arose contemporaneously, and flourished concurrently, with the fashion of vignette-illustration. The transition to that method may be observed in

[1] On the first leaf of the above cited opuscule of Ferettus, we find the popular design of the Professor lecturing from his chair, surrounded by his students, executed in a free outline woodcut, probably also of Venetian origin.



FROM THE "FASCICULUS DE MEDICINA," OF JOANNES KETHAM. VENICE 1491.
"THE MAN STRICKEN BY THE PLAGUE."



The Mouse and the Frog. Fable IV. From the Aesop, of Venice, 1491.

a woodcut, displaying great vigour of style, which adorns the title-page of an edition of the "Sphera Mundi" of Johannes de Sacro Busco (Hain, 14113), produced in 1490 by an unknown printer for the publishing-house ("mandato et expensis") of Ottaviano Scoto. It represents Astronomy, enthroned between Urania and Ptolemy; and is not unworthy to have been executed after some design of the elder Bellini. The figure of Ptolemy is crowned, as was customary in the Middle Ages, when the astronomer of Pelusium was supposed to have been one of the Greek kings of Egypt.

If, in this print, we find that the engraving of the block still betrays angularities and a want of firmness in the lines, we can point nevertheless to more finished and uniform work in some outline-woodcuts which appeared in an Æsop printed in 1491. The book is a small quarto volume, charmingly illustrated; the designs being redrawn and improved from those in the Venice Æsop of 1487. There is so much artistic freedom in the treatment of the cuts, that they are fully entitled to be regarded as new and independent compositions. The animal-figures are full of spirit, and are sketched with great boldness and precision; a more delicate grace marks the drawing of the human figures. Tasteful borders, composed of separate pieces frequently repeated in various combinations, serve as frames to the pictures. The engraving is executed in fine outlines. This little book seems to have become very popular, as it passed through a series of re-issues and new editions, continued till after the year 1500.[1]

A remarkable departure from the fashion of outline-engraving so much in vogue at that time in Venice, is to be observed in

[1] The book seems to have been issued at first without the customary Life of Æsop at the beginning. In one copy of the edition of 1491, the "Vita Esopi" is dated 1492. This supposed biography, which follows Tuppo's version, has the following colophon. — "Impressum Venetiis per Manfredum de Monteferato de Sustreno de benellis MCCCCLXXXXII die XXVI Martii regnante domino Augustino Barbadico inclito Venetiarum principe." This is followed by the Fables, as a second part, with the heading: "Acci Zucchi . . . in Aesopi fabulas interpretatio . . ." etc. At the end: "Impressum Venetiis per Manfredum . . . de Sustreno MCCCCLXXXXI a di ultimo Zenaro", followed by "Tavola dele predette tabule." Other editions with the same woodcuts appeared in 1492, 1493, 1497, etc.

the six woodcuts of the "Triumphi", which appeared in an edition of Petrarch printed in 1491 by Piero Cremonese "detto Veronese". These illustrations, executed in folio dimensions, are shaded by means of narrow layers of simple lines, in a manner which serves to give the work an isolated position among the Italian woodcuts of the fifteenth century. When we look more closely into the artistic method of the performance, we discover the reason of the peculiar aspect which strikes us in those cuts. They are copies of copper-engravings, and were imitated from the old Florentine plates ascribed to Baldini, of which the British Museum now possesses the magnificent set bought by Mr. Quaritch at the sale of the Sunderland library. The Venetian wood-engraver retained the principal forms and motifs of the original compositions, while altering several of the figures, and giving them somewhat of a Venetian character. But in transferring to the woodblock the technical style of the copper-plate, he failed to achieve anything like the delicacy of his model.

Those woodcuts not only give us assurance that the copper-engravings were in existence before 1492, but also attest that the plates had already been considerably re-touched. There are indeed some details which enable us to conclude, without hesitation, that it was from the third state of the plates,[1] completely re-touched and renovated, that the wood-engraver made his copies.

In a work, the text of which, according to our modern notions, would have afforded the least possible opportunity for artistic embellishment, — namely, a medical hand-book produced in Venice — we meet with some outline wood-engravings designed and executed in a style of the highest technical perfection. Johannes Ketham, a German physician, resident in Italy, compiled his "Fasciculus de Medicina" from the various works on that subject which were then most in vogue. The book was first printed in 1491, in Latin, by the brothers Johannes and Gregorius "de Forlivio", or, as they also used to style themselves, "de Gregoriis"; in a thin folio volume of larger size than usual (Hain, 9774). This first edition contains only a few anatomical or surgical woodcuts, such

[1] *F. Lippmann, Jahrbuch der Preuss. Kunstsamml.*, V, p. 148.

as a conventional human figure having all the portions of the body marked, at which the operation of blood-letting should be performed at certain times; a similar figure exhibiting all the most ordinary forms of bodily injuries; and others of a like nature. Notwithstanding the dry scientific purpose which is apparent, and the uncongenial character of the accessories, there is in those designs so much energy and strength, so much of antique severity in the modelling, that they wear an unmistakeable air of grandeur. We are tempted, by a certain affinity between the figure in the "Arbor Consanguinitatis", (see Crispus page 69 of the present treatise) and those in the first edition of Ketham, to ascribe the artistic illustration of both volumes to a single hand. The execution of the outline-work in the latter, is thin and angular.

Two years later, that is, in 1493, an Italian translation of Ketham's hand-book was produced by the same printers, in a new and more richly decorated form.[1] The opportunity afforded by the issue of this version, to enlarge the number of illustrations, was not neglected by the printers. New and more elaborate figures were substituted for the old ones; and some free original compositions were added.

If, nowadays, we find it difficult to understand why, in a purely medical treatise, such illustrations were inserted, as that of the lecturing physician, or that of the physician in conference with his colleagues, and the like; we must, in order to realise the motive, endeavour to place ourselves in the position of the artist's contemporaries. It was difficult for men of average education and intellect, at that time, to conceive abstract ideas by the process of mere logical deduction; and they welcomed therefore the graphic aid which translated the word into visible form. The pictures were germane to the subject, they were in no sense superfluous, and neither by the publisher who procured them, nor by the artist who executed his commission, were they regarded as a display

[1] [Ketham (Johannes)] "Incomincia el dignissimo Fasciculo de Medicina in Volgare . . ." At the end: ". . . qui finisce el fasciculo di Medicina Vulgarizato per Sebastiano Manlio Romano e stampito per Zuane e Gregorio di Gregorii nel 1493. V Februario in Venexia." Folio. (Unknown to Hain.) See Choulant, Geschichte und Bibliographie der anatomischen Abbildung. 1852. 8vo.



The Triumph of Fame; from the Petrarch, of Venice, 1492.

of decorative luxury. The woodcut of the lecturing physician served to betoken the earnest scientific purpose of the text, and fixed this assurance in the mind of the purchaser more clearly and impressively than any printed statement could have done it. Considered in this light, the artistic illustration of Ketham's book will no longer strike us as being the mere childlike indulgence in useless adornment, which, at first sight, it might appear to be. Along with the purely professional designs, adopted or adapted from those in the original edition, we find in the Italian version of 1493, four new woodcuts, each of them filling a folio page. In the first, we see the physician, Petrus de Montagnana, lecturing from his rostrum: beneath him sit an old man, and a woman with a child, who represent the patients. The second exhibits a pillared hall, with a consultation of physicians; and the third represents the dissection of a dead body, with a doctor lecturing from his chair above, and a number of students standing below, witnessing the operation. In the fourth, a man sick with the plague is seen lying on a bed, surrounded by several persons; amongst them, two assistants bearing censers for fumigation.

The design is undoubtedly by an artist nearly related to Gentile Bellini. The figures are from twelve to fifteen centimetres in height, and — especially the heads — drawn with much skill. There is a statuesque ease in the arrangement of the compositions, which gives them an appearance of relief, and harmonises admirably with the simple and firm outline-drawing. The scenes which exhibit the dying plague-patient, and the consultation of doctors, have a touch of that solemn gravity which Venetian art knew so well how to infuse into the pictorial representation of important incidents.

Ketham's book passed through several editions before 1500. The fine woodcut of the scene of dissection had disappeared before 1495, or perhaps the block was no longer capable of service, as it was replaced by an inferior copy; and finally, in the edition of 1500, many of the cuts are defective in consequence of the wearing or breaking away of the lower portion of the blocks.[1]

[1] See the description of the various editions in Choulant's work.

The brothers De Gregoriis, who published Ketham's Fasciculo, appear to have devoted particular attention to the production of woodcuts; to judge from the number and variety of the works of their press, which display artistic embellishment. A Latin translation of Herodotus (Hain, 8472) brought out by them in 1494, has its first page adorned with a magnificent woodcut border, consisting of rich pilaster-forms, printed in white relief on a black ground. Beneath, there is a picturesque illustration, engraved in strong simple outlines, the subject of which is not recognisable, and may perhaps represent a misconception of some antique compositions. In the upper corner, beside the initial letter, Herodotus is seen sitting at a table, while Apollo places a laurel crown upon his head.

This is probably the most splendid of all the examples of decorative art applied to books at that period. In the unsurpassed elegance of its architectural construction, and the flawless perfection with which the wood-engraver rendered the design, it can be compared with nothing but the finest specimens of inlaid work. The effect produced by this beautiful woodcut, with its simple elements of white and black, is such as to bring it into successful rivalry with the most brilliant miniature illumination. We find the same border used again (but without the figures of Herodotus and Apollo) in an edition of St. Jerome's works printed in 1497-98 (Hain, 8581); in which, however, the mythological tableau in the lower portion seems rather inappropriate to the book (Vol. II, folio AA2 recto).[1]

There is an interesting woodcut in the *Doctrina della Vita monastica* of Beato Laurenzo Justiniano, 1494 (without the printer's name, but probably printed by the brothers De Gregoriis). It represents a saintly monk moving forward to the church, and raising his left hand in the act of bestowing a blessing, with an acolyte bearing a cross in front. The monk's figure is entirely borrowed from a picture, painted in 1466 by Gentile Bellini for the church of S. Maria del Orto. The painting is executed in tempera upon canvas, and is a portrait of Saint Lorenzo Justiniano (the author

[1] A reproduction of this border will be found in Yriarte, "Venice", p. 192.



From St. Lorenzo Justiniano: "Doctrina della Vita Monastica". Venice, 1494.

of the Doctrina) surrounded by several other figures. Those accessory groups, as well as the halo with which the painter had crowned his monk, were omitted by the wood-engraver; but he has completely retained the characteristics of the principal figure,

even to the very physical type of the head.[1] This is one of the few instances in which we are enabled to trace the relation between a woodcut of the period under consideration, and an undoubtedly contemporary painting.

The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, or rather the Italian version of that work made by Giovanni di Bonsignore of Città di Castello, was printed for the first time, in 1497, by Giovanni Rosso at Venice, for the publishing-house of Lucantonio Giunta (Hain, 12166). It is a small folio volume, illustrated with fifty-nine woodcuts, of which an idea may be obtained from the facsimile given here. The compositions are definite and well-arranged, the figures carefully drawn in the manner of Bellini's school; but the execution is stiff and dry, and betrays the hand of the mere professional illustrator. The engraver was unable, or too careless, to reproduce exactly the lines of his excellent models, and it is plain that the details of the block-work are often much less delicate than the drawing of the originals.[2]

The mode of treatment varies considerably; the execution of the outline engraving being at times performed with thorough technical completeness, while in other instances the cuts appear to be merely imitations of a broad pen and ink drawing. In some, we discover a style resembling the Florentine manner, in the use of heavy masses of shadow broken by white lights. On the whole, those illustrations form a fine and attractive work, notwithstanding the want of care with which the blocks were printed in the first, and still more in the later editions.

Most of the woodcuts are marked with the monogram **ia**, in Gothic characters; in a few it is printed in Roman capitals.

This monogram has usually been confounded with the "Z. A". signature which occurs on Italian prints of the fifteenth century;

[1] See the engraving of Gentile Bellini's painting in the Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst, Vol. XIII, p. 342.

[2] The blocks of the 1497 Ovid were used again in various later Venetian editions of the same work, the last time being, so far as we know, in 1517. Side by side with them, there appeared other editions with copies of those cuts, but the imitations do not bear the **ia** monogram. There are besides, some other editions, in which the true 1497 cuts are found mixed with impressions of the copies; one, for example, in 1509.



Apollo and Marsyas from Ovidio: Metamorphoseos Vulgare. Venice, 1497.

and both of them are referred to Zoan Andrea Vavassore, "detto Guadagnino". The uncertainty and confusion which prevail with regard to the artist, or artists, concealed under those initials, have been nowise diminished by Kolloff's article on "Zoan Andrea", in Meyer's Künstlerlexikon. In Mr. Fisher's "Introduction to a Catalogue of the early Italian prints in the British Museum", all the existing items of information concerning Zoan Andrea are diligently collected, and marshalled in review.[1] But the riddle is still unread, the name and the monograms remain for us a puzzle, and the mystery of that manifold artistic phenomenon cannot be solved in the present essay.

So much as we know with regard to the personality of Zoan Andrea, is limited to the following particulars. At a time, of which we cannot fix the exact date, he was in Mantua, implicated in a dispute between Simone di Ardizoni, a painter and copper-engraver, and Andrea Mantegna. From the documentary evidence on the subject, or rather from the sole existing fragment now preserved in the Gonzaga archives,[2] we learn that Zoan Andrea had been previously resident in Verona, along with Ardizoni, from whom he received assistance in his business. Of his extant works, we possess no certain knowledge beyond the fact that, about 1500, a wood-engraver, or, to speak more correctly, a publisher of woodcuts, was flourishing at Venice; many of whose published pieces bear the name of "Giovanni Andrea Valvassori detto Guadagnino", or "Joanne Andrea di Vavassori detto Vadagnino".[3]

The first of those two forms appears on a set of woodcuts representing the Passion, and produced in book-shape, with some lines of text at the bottom of each illustration. As this text is not typographical, but an integral portion of the engraving on the blocks, the work is a real "blockbook", the only one of Italian origin known to us. It is not, of course, the primitive production of an undeveloped art, like the blockbooks of Germany and the Netherlands, but an ordinary example of popular chapbook-manufacture, and

[1] London, 1886. 8vo. pp. 201—215.

[2] K. Brun, in the Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst, XI, p. 54.

[3] "Zoan" is the Venetian form of the Italian "Giovanni".

should not be regarded as anything else. The title of the little volume is *Opera nuova contemplativa;* its date is 1516.

The compositions are partly rude imitations of Dürer's designs, partly after Mantegna; many of them are wretchedly executed, several others are somewhat better; but even those which are relatively the best can lay no claim to artistic merit. Here, possibly, Vavassore may have been at once the engraver, the printer, and the publisher, of the work that bears his name. We have no data with regard to the foundation of his establishment in Venice; it was probably towards the close of the last decade of the fifteenth century. He published the *Opera nuova* in 1516; in 1531, his name appeared as that of a printer, in partnership with his brother Florio, on a book containing instructions how to compose love-letters.[1] But, as late as 1566, we find the name of "Giovanni Andrea Valvassori" on an illustrated edition of the Orlando Furioso, produced at Venice.[2] If this printer were identical with the engraver Zoan Andrea, the varied career of the latter, as an artist and a printer, must have been protracted to the incredible period of seventy years.

The Berlin Print-room possesses a wood-engraving of the largest oblong folio size, representing the history of the Passion in a number of separate scenes, divided from one another by borders of architectonic and landscape ornament. A much earlier Italian print had already treated the same subjects in a similar fashion (Ottley, Facsimiles, plate 22).

On the woodcut in the Berlin Print-room, a tablet in the centre of the leaf bears the inscription. "In Venetia per Zuan Andrea Vadagnino di Vauasor".[3] The conception and treatment of the figures are indicative of an artist who belonged essentially to Mantegna's school, but who, like many other woodcut-designers, — in this respect, true successors of the miniature-painters — borrowed hints and motifs at random, from various schools of art.

[1] Fisher, p. 207.

[2] Fisher, p. 208; Brunet, Manuel, I, 435.

[3] The name of Vavassore appears also on a woodcut map of Italy, and that of "Zoan Andrea" on a leaf in a series of woodcut copies of Dürer's Apocalypse. (Passavant, le Peintre-Graveur, VI, p. 87.)

The execution is rather mechanical, although far superior to that of the *Opera nuova*. The mode of engraving betokens individuality. As in the prints of Mantegna and his school, the outlines are boldly drawn, and the effect of relief is obtained by parallel slanting lines, unhatched, which are thick and heavy in the shadows, but diminish into fine strokes in the lights.

The Berlin Print-room possesses likewise another woodcut by Zoan Andrea, 51 centimetres in height and 72 in breadth. It is a view of the city of Rhodes, with the armies of the besiegers and the defenders; executed coarsely, in a style of primitive rudeness. At the top of the engraving, there is an inscription — "Stampato in Venetia per Vadagino di Vavassori Nel MCCCCCXXII". A similarly treated view of Padua is to be seen in the Hofbibliothek at Vienna.

Many Venetian woodcuts, whether illustrations in books or separate engravings on single-leaves, are similar in style to the signed works of Zoan Andrea. The mark Z.A., which appears on several of them, leaves no doubt as to their origin in his atelier. It is indeed to an atelier, or work-shop employing many hands, and not to any individual artist, — as was already rightly conjectured by Ottley, — that we should assign the use of those signatures. The artistic quality of the works bearing either the mark or the name of Zoan Andrea, varies so widely between two extremes, some being well and carefully executed, others of the very coarsest kind; that only an establishment in which many workmen of different degrees of skill and talent were occupied, could have produced results so heterogeneous. Even the best of those woodcuts do not reach the level of fine artistic excellence, but at most display simply the average mediocrity of all productions which are manufactured, and therefore essentially tasteless. The copies of Dürer's Apocalypse, which Zoan Andrea brought out at the same time as the *Opera nuova*, in 1516, are also very significant of his mode of operation. Some very able artists combined in the illustration of this tiny booklet, and drew pictures which are free imitations of Dürer's designs. The very first page is a good reproduction of "St. John's vision of the seven Candlesticks", as pourtrayed by that creative genius. It is followed immediately by

a number of poor mechanical copies of other originals, with here and there an occasional example of superior kind. Zoan Andrea was, without doubt, a skilful engraver on copper, although he may not have possessed any special talent for his art, or any ambition to develop an individual character in his work. Even in his workshop, he carried on the practice of copper-engraving, more extensively perhaps in the earlier, than in the later portion of his career. The Italian prints which bear the mark of Z.A. were executed, we may conjecture, partly by himself, and partly by his assistants. Most of these plates are copies after Dürer, Mantegna, and others; those which we are unable to refer to any certain models have a mechanical and commonplace appearance, with no trace of original character. Everything seems to harmonise with the assumption that the monogram Z.A. was simply the mark used to indicate a particular workshop, which not only was employed by the book-printers, but also laboured to enrich its own stock, and to supply the market with cheap woodcuts and engravings. This is probably the most rational way to account for the otherwise incomprehensible fructiveness of Zoan Andrea, in the twin departments of copper and wood engraving.

It is customary to refer to Zoan Andrea the monogram ia which appears in the 1497 Ovid and elsewhere, — without, as it seems to us, sufficient reason. That mark does not consist of two initials, but, in all probability, of the first two letters of a single name. If it had been intended to express two initials, we may feel tolerably certain that the i and the a would have been divided by points, or clearly separated from each other by a space. That mode of division is observable in every instance of the use of Z.A., whilst its absence in the other monogram may be explained from the manner in which we see inscriptions on woodcuts representing St. James, in this form — S. IA. (that is, *Sanctus Jacobus*. See Meyer, Künstlerlexikon, I, p. 706; Passavant, V, p. 83, no. 46). With such an indication before us, we may venture to assume that the ia monogram belongs to some artist named Jacobus.

Two masters who bore that name, were, at the period of which we are writing, actively engaged at Venice in making designs

for woodcuts; — Jacob of Strassburg, and Jacopo de' Barbari (Walch). Let us first turn our attention upon the former.

In the year 1504, there was published at Venice, a large woodcut, in the style of a frieze, representing the *Triumph of Cæsar*, in a series of twelve leaves. The composition is not very interesting in itself, and it lacks proportion and harmony; but the separate figures are powerfully drawn, and the whole work, although not marked by any special artistic genius, evinces the training and labour of a practised hand. In the technique of the engraving, we observe an imitation of the mode of treatment adopted by Mantegna and his school, in the execution of copper-prints. — Indeed, even the style of the design might be said to stamp the *Triumph of Cæsar* as a production of that school. — According to Passavant (Peintre-Graveur, I, p. 133) the first of the twelve leaves bears this inscription: "Manibus propriis hoc preclarum opus in lucem prodire fecit Jacobus Argentoratensis germanus architypus solertissimus. Anno virginei partus M. D. III. Idibus februarii sub hemisphaero Veneto finem imposuit". There is no such inscription on the copy in the Berlin Print-room, in which we find, instead, merely a few lines of letter-press relative to the subject of the illustration. We cannot decide here whether the Berlin copy, exhibiting as it does admirable impressions, is of an earlier or a later state than the one in which the inscription was found; but we should be inclined to think it earlier.

A second work, manifestly by the same artist, is a large leaf with an allegorical subject (— Passavant thinks it satyrical;) having an inscription, "Istoria Romana", in the upper left-hand corner. On the right, we see the remnant of a tree which has been cut down; to the bole a label is affixed, bearing the signature "Opus Jacobi", while a compass lies on the flat upper-surface of the trunk. A description of the composition is rendered unnecessary by the accompanying reduced facsimile.[1] The original is 29 centimetres in height by 39 in breadth.[2]

[1] Taken from the copy in the collection of Baron Edmond Rothschild at Paris.

[2] Professor Dr. C. Robert in Berlin has written some very learned and acute observations on the subject of the woodcut described above. Their



ALLEGORY
WOODCUT BY JACOB OF STRASSBURG
REDUCED FACSIMILE

The technical execution of the "Istoria Romana" is extremely successful; the intended effect of high plastic relief being completely realised. This is not so evident in our facsimile; the great reduction of size which was necessary here, being incompatible with any adequate expression of the broad and powerful treatment which marks the original. The artist who made the design must have been an immediate follower of Mantegna, if it were not indeed the master himself whose hand drew the sketch from which the woodcut was elaborated. In spite of the indication on the cartellina, we cannot assign to the "Jacobus" of the inscription, any other part in this work than that of the mere engraver, nor to the word "opus" any other sense than belongs to the mechanical labour

substance is extracted here. — The Jacobus woodcut reproduces the sculptures on a Hippolytus sarcophagus of the type best known from the Pisan and Capuan examples. That of Pisa contains the bones of Beatrice, the mother of the Countess Matilda of Tuscany, who died in 1072; and it is now preserved in the interior of the Campo Santo. Niccola Pisano frequently used it to model from; and in the Renaissance it was well known and admired. Lasinio has reproduced it (tav. LXXIII). The other sarcophagus is in the crypt of the cathedral at Capua. Gerhard has given an illustration of it (Ant. Bildw. XXVI).

It is almost certain that one of those two monuments furnished Jacobus with his model. In almost all respects, the design in the woodcut more nearly resembles the Capuan sarcophagus; and if we exclude a single particular in which it comes closer to that of Pisa, we might account for the several modifications by supposing that Jacobus drew at second-hand from an intermediate sketch which he did not wholly comprehend. The illustration on the sarcophagus and in the woodcut, is a combination of scenes from the story of Hippolytus and Phaedra, but it is probable either that Jacobus, in imitating his original, amplified and varied it so as to express his own idea of the myth, or else that he simply utilised the old design to represent some different subject in his mind, drawn from Roman mythology. The title "Istoria Romana" suggests the correctness of the latter view. He seems also to have intended to attach a symbolical sense to the mythological figures; so that in Phaedra, sented beneath the laurel tree, we may recognize perhaps Virtue; in Hippolytus, standing before her, with the caduceus in his hand, Prudence; in the bearded man on his left hand, Justice; in the second figure of Hippolytus, as a mounted and armed warrior, Fortitude; in the female by his side who is about to put a bit in the horse's mouth, Temperance. The figure on the pedestal, with the Janus head in her right hand, and the initials S. P. Q. R. beneath her feet, is evidently an impersonation of Rome. The dragon in front of the mounted Hippolytus, and the two figures behind Phaedra, probably symbolise the evil influences in opposition to the cardinal virtues. The *putti*, or naked children, are Cupids; the woman's bust at the top of the laurel tree represents Daphne.

on the wood-block. The very circumstance that the inscription appears on the fragment of a tree left standing by the woodcutter's axe, and the accompanying pair of compasses, may serve as testimony in support of our opinion; since we can only consider them as a sort of engraver's mark, added by himself.

Even if we allow that no sharply marked distinction was made at that time between the man who created a composition, and the artisan who reproduced it by a multiplying process, or in other words between the artist and the engraver; it seems nevertheless that we have to regard Jacob of Strassburg as chiefly excelling in the latter function. Besides the *Triumph of Cæsar*, and the *Istoria Romana*, there is a third woodcut bearing his name; and in this last, we find a striking instance of his position as an engraver, in clear contra-distinction to that of a designer.

The work in question is a magnificent woodcut in the Paris Cabinet. It is a sheet, 53½ centimetres high by 38 broad, impressed from two blocks, and represents the Madonna enthroned in a niche framed within richly ornamental pilasters. On the steps of the dais, right and left, appear St. Roch and St. Sebastian. In the upper corners, there are two tablets with inscriptions; in the one on the left, we read "Benedictus Pinxit", in that on the right, "Jacobus Fecit". The architectural portions and the background of the throne are decorated in an extremely rich and tasteful manner, and exhibit small separate pictures of the Passion.[1]

The words "Benedictus pinxit", and the style of the design and composition, are unquestionably to be referred to Benedetto Montagna. That master, who had made several essays in copper-engraving, and attained a considerable measure of skill in the use of the burin — as in *St. Jerome in the Landscape* (Bartsch, 14) and *the sitting Madonna* (Bartsch, 6) — here entered into the lists as a designer for woodcuts. The types of the heads, full and round, which are noticeable in his copper-prints, appear again in the woodcut, and the method of drawing the lines which indicate relief is similar to that which we observe in his work executed with the graver. It was his practice, — differing from that of the

[1] A reduced facsimile is given by Delaborde, La Gravure en Italie, p. 231.

Paduan and Milanese school — to model with curved lines which adjusted themselves to the sinuosities and flexions of the figure. He had gained a masterly freedom of hand in the use of this method, from the study and imitation of early work on copper by Dürer and other German artists.

The large woodcut of *the Madonna with the two Saints* shows us how the blockcutter was able to adapt himself to the manner of the design before him. Instead of Mantegna's mode of linear shading, we find here a system of cross-hatching used to bring the forms into relief. The skill displayed by Jacob in his manipulation of the wood-block, is not less excellent in this production than in the *Istoria Romana*. The execution is broad, free, and firm; displaying a comprehensive mastery of the entire plan, and admirably suited to the large scale of the performance; but it is based on a totally different style of design from that of the *Istoria*.

In the private collection of the King of Saxony, at Dresden, there is an old woodcut freely copied from *the Madonna* of Montagna and Jacob of Strassburg. It is perhaps nearly contemporaneous with its original. The composition here is simplified and contracted, and the rich architectural accessories partly omitted; but the relative position of the Madonna, the Child, and the two Saints, is the same, except that St. Sebastian is on the right and St. Roch on the left, in the Dresden woodcut. Beneath, on the steps of the throne, a new tableau is added, exhibiting the Infant Saviour drawn in triumph and surrounded by angels. The name of the printer, or publisher, appears on the lower margin — "In Verona per Bartolomeo Merlo". The Dresden copy is in old colouring.

The three woodcuts described above, furnish us with the only certain information that we possess, in regard to the labours of Jacob of Strassburg. The question previously enounced, as to whether the monogram **ia** is to be interpreted "Jacobus", is not indeed solved by the existence of those signed works, but it is, we may hope, drawn somewhat nearer to solution.

From the year 1497, when it appeared for the first time in the Ovid, down to about 1520, that mark recurs several times, chiefly on the illustrations in books of an ascetic and spiritual

character. These were usually printed at Venice, and decorated with pictures, borders, and ornamental initials. The publication of illustrated Breviaries, Offices, and Missals, was extensively carried on in that city, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, just as the kindred production of illustrated *Horæ*, or *Livres d'Heures*, formed a special branch of typographical industry in Paris, at the same time. Although the Venetian books were much less numerous than the interminable series of the Parisian *Horæ*, they constitute nevertheless a very large section of the literature of illustrated prayerbooks. The pictorial designs, and the ornamental borders in which the pages of text are framed, are very skilfully disposed, and stand out in effective relief from the handsome red and black letterpress of the text. The printers seem to have striven, by every attainable excellence of ornamental typography, to rival and supplant the still existent, but fast disappearing, productions of the miniaturists.

Notwithstanding its studied elegance, this kind of typographical ornamentation is, from the standpoint of art-history, less attractive and less important than we might have anticipated. There is, in the splendour of the illustration, an expression which betrays the vulgarity of manufactured work; — in which respect also, we find a parallel between the Venetian liturgical books and the French *Livres d'Heures*. We soon acquire the conviction that those illustrations were, as a general rule, executed by artists who, although well trained in the practice of their craft, were yet of a meaner sort, and simply accustomed to the mechanical reproduction of certain conventional models. Hence the frequent iteration throughout each volume of the same decorative borders, — a fact which tends not a little to render the effect monotonous, — and the repetition of identical woodcuts in various books, and in various editions of a single book. The publishing-house of Lucantonio da Giunta was especially active in the production of such books; those which appeared during the few years immediately following 1500, being relatively the best. Their artistic quality, except in a few instances, decreased with the growth of the century, in a constantly augmenting ratio. But the issue of new impressions, and of copies and imitations, from the old woodblocks, led to the

conservation of the old Venetian and Mantegnesque style of treatment, far into the sixteenth century, — a curious phenomenon which is also to be remarked elsewhere in connexion with the printing of illustrated books.

A great many of the woodcuts in those Venetian liturgical books were produced, as is shown by the Z. A. signature which



From the "Missale Romanum". Venice, 1509.

frequently occurs, in the workshop of Zoan Andrea. There is an occasional appearance among them of a fresher style of execution, but it soon dies out, nearly all bearing the stamp of tame and monotonous mediocrity, and deserving to be considered rather as commercial, than artistic, performances.[1]

[1] Into the merits of this group of Venetian illustrated prayerbooks we can proceed no further, as they nearly all belong to the sixteenth century, and thus lie outside the scope of our present investigation. Considering the rarity of copies,

In one of the handsomest books of this kind, a *Missale Romanum* which appeared in various successive editions at Venice, after 1500, there are numerous woodcuts which bear the mark ia. Another magnificent example is the Czech, or Bohemian, Bible, printed in the same city in the year 1500 "in Edibus Petri Lichtenstein Coloniensis Germani".

The drawing and composition of the figures must be referred to an able artist of the school of Cima da Conegliano: and the work of the engraver is done with great care and skill. These woodcuts are very different, in all respects, from those which bear the same monogram in the 1497 Ovid; but the complete similarity of the signatures in each of the books, cannot be explained otherwise than by assuming that all the woodcuts so marked were

as well as the multiplicity of the various editions, the enumeration of a few isolated titles here would have been of little service. Brunet has done something towards a record of such books, in the notices given by him under "Breviarium", "Missale", "Officium"; but the only attempt to form a complete bibliography of the Missals is Mr. W. H. J. Weale's excellent "Catalogus Missalium Ritus Latini. Londini, B. Quaritch, 1886". 8vo. The same painstaking scholar promises to give the "Breviaria" before long.

In an article on the devotional books of the fifteenth century (Jahrbuch der k. Preuss. Kunstsammlungen, VI, p. 36 etc.) Dr. von Seidlitz asserts that the Venetian printers, before the end of that century, had already begun to produce imitations of the French *Livres d'Heures*. One of the books which he describes as Venetian, and adduces in support of his opinion, is a small volume, intitled *Hore nostre domine secundum usum ecclesie romane*, but without any indication of the place and date of its production. It has however, on the title-page, a device containing the initials M. R. accompanied by the lion of St. Mark, which is sufficient evidence that the book was printed by Marcus Reinhard of Strassburg, and issued from the press which he had established at Lyons in or before the year 1491. By the figure of the lion of St. Mark, which signifies nothing more than a play upon Reinhard's Christian name, Dr. von Seidlitz was probably misled to suppose that he had an Italian book before him. His error is all the more singular, as the woodcuts are of undeniably German style and origin, and resemble the illustrations in the *Miroir de la vie humaine* (translated from the celebrated *Speculum* of Rodericus Zamorensis) which was published by Reinhard, in partnership with Nicolaus Philippi, at Lyons in 1492. As for the second prayer-book described by Dr. von Seidlitz, and printed by Johann Hamman "dictus Herzog" at Venice in 1493 (or rather 1498), it is said to contain illustrations and ornamental borders in slight outlines; but I have never seen it, and am therefore unable to form an opinion as to whether it should be considered an imitation of the French *Heures*.

the work of one and the same engraver. The diversity in style and execution simply shows that the monogram has no reference to the designer, and is merely the mark of the craftsman who cut the blocks, and who worked from different drawings at different times.

Amongst the monograms and artists' marks which are found upon woodcuts, two kinds of signatures have to be distinguished; namely that of the designer, and that of the engraver. On the works of Dürer and Cranach, for example, the block-cutter is completely ignored, while, on the contrary, in a certain late group of German woodcuts, it was frequently his custom to place his own monogram beside that of the designer, and to indicate his craft by the addition of a small knife. In Italy, at the time with which we are dealing here, such double marks were never used: and we can only endeavour, by indirect approaches, to reach the solution of the question whether a solitary signature on a woodcut is that of the designer, or of the engraver.

It may be assumed that the mark belongs to the engraver, if it be found on a series of works which differ among themselves in all the characteristics of design. In such cases, the drawings may have been prepared by various hands, but they were all cut upon the wood by the one man whose monogram they bear. A monogram or signature of this kind is what may be termed "an engraver's mark".

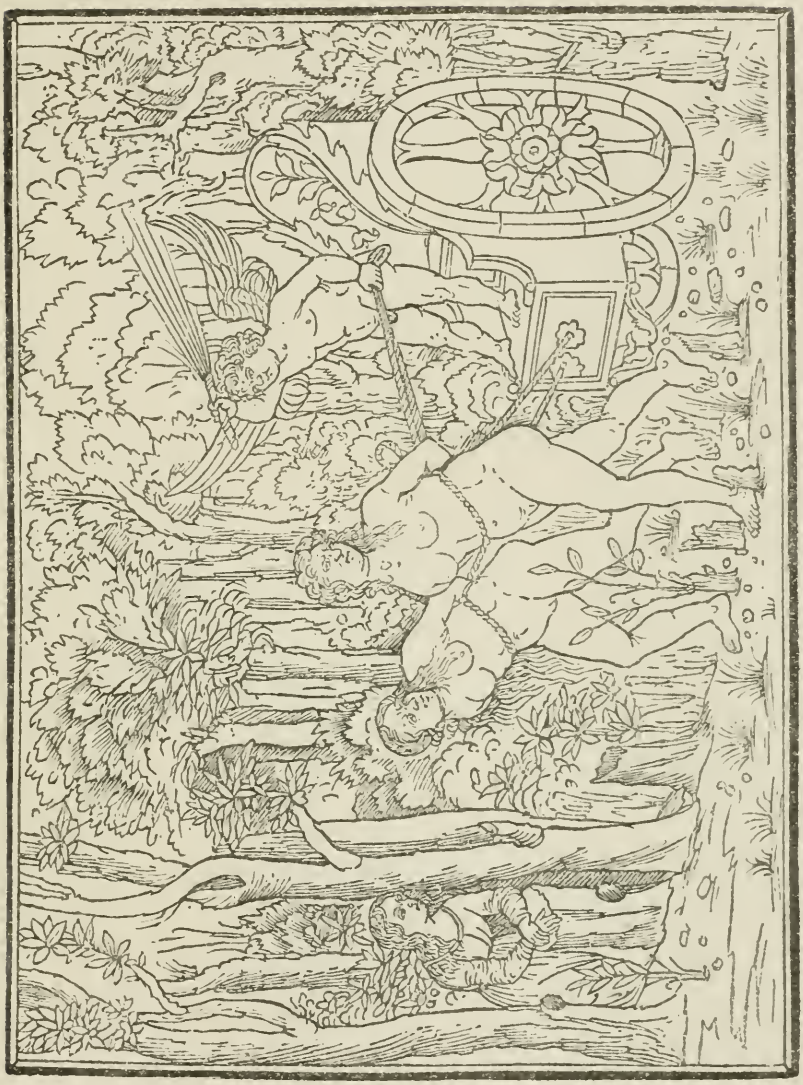
From the circumstantial evidence which they furnish, with regard to the varieties of style and design, it is tolerably clear that the woodcuts bearing the signature ia fall into the preceding category, and that those letters are the engraver's mark. There is a possibility, or rather a probability, that they are an abridgment of the word *Iacobus*, and refer to the man whose name occurs in that form on the *Istoria Romana*, and who, on the *Triumph of Cæsar*, describes himself as *Iacobus Argentoratensis* (Jacob of Strassburg).

If this theory be correct in fact, it enables us at least to establish the existence and the name of an artist connected with early Venetian wood-engraving, and consequently to show that his mark, ia (meaning Jacobus), must be distinguished from the

Z. A. of Zoan Andrea, with which it has hitherto been erroneously confounded. There is nothing adverse to this view in the fact that certain illustrated books comprise woodcuts by each of the two men: as is the case, for instance, in the Apocalypse printed by Alexandro Paganino in 1516, some of the cuts in which are marked ia, and some Z. A. The publisher naturally employed various engravers for his work, which is a reproduction of Dürer's designs.

If an engraver's mark is to be recognised, as we have stated, by its appearance on a number of woodcuts unlike each other in style and drawing, we have now, on the other hand, to inquire whether there may be found, among the Italian woodcuts of the fifteenth century, any such thing as a "designer's mark", analogous to the monograms of Dürer and Cranach in Germany, and indicating the artist who drew the picture, as distinguished from the craftsman who cut the block. It will not be denied that the composer, creator, or designer, was frequently, during the course of his career, whether from choice or necessity, led to entrust his drawings to more than one engraver for translation to the wood-block. We have positive knowledge that the fact was such in Dürer's case, notwithstanding the uniformity, within certain limits, of the work thus done for him. The characteristic style of a woodcut is entirely derived from the designer, the quality of the performance varies according to the greater or lesser ability of the engraver. Hence, if we find one and the same mark upon a series of woodcuts which differ considerably from each other in point of executive skill, but exhibit essential affinities of style and drawing, we must regard it as a designer's mark. Venetian wood-engraving in the fifteenth century furnishes a conspicuous opportunity for applying this theory. We are now referring to the master from whom we have the woodcuts of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili.*

That remarkable book, the subject of so much discussion, was written by Francesco Columna or Colonna (born about 1433), who afterwards became a Dominican monk, and died in the monastery of San Giovanni e San Paolo at Venice about 1527. It is a visionary and allegorical romance, based, according to the old but not perhaps contemporary statement, upon an actual love-



From the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili. Venice, Aldus Manutius, 1499.

passage between the author and a lady, said to have been named "Ippolita". The hopes of the lover having been shattered by Ippolita's entrance into a convent, he sought to immortalise his passion in a mystical romance. Under the name of "Polia", the lady plays in this singular fiction a part similar to that of Dante's Beatrice, and guides the author through a dream-land, in which his appellation is "Poliphilo", signifying Polia's lover.

Even the exordium of the book is borrowed from the *Divina Commedia.* The narrator wanders through a wood, is overcome by weariness and falls asleep, and then has a dream. His vision is the *Hypnerotomachia*, that is, The Struggle of Dreaming Love.

The imaginary land through which Poliphilo and Polia wander, is the region of Classic Art, such as it seemed to be to the minds of the fifteenth century. It is the architecture of antiquity which forms the chief attraction of their quest.

Francesco Colonna wrote the *Hypnerotomachia* in 1467. The first edition, produced by Aldus in 1499, is the object of our present consideration. It was given to the press by Leonardo Crasso, a Veronese jurist, and dedicated to Guido, Duke of Urbino. The manuscript from which this edition was printed was probably imperfect, but since Aldus Manutius considered it worthy to bear his name, and to come forth in all the splendour of his choicest typography, we may conjecture that this confused and rambling story enjoyed a certain measure of favour amongst the lovers of classical antiquity who surrounded the great printer.[1]

The numerous woodcuts of the Aldine edition mark the highest point of developement reached by the art of wood-engraving at Venice, in the fifteenth century. It is true that the artist who designed those illustrations was not in every instance capable of translating into adequate pictorial form, the ideas presented by the author. Some one greater than he would have

[1] The disquisition on the Poliphilo which is found in the "Kleine Schriften" of Johann Dominicus Fiorillo (Göttingen, 1803; Vol. I, p. 153) is still the best of its kind. Albert Ilg's comprehensive essay "Ueber den kunsthistorischen Wert der Hypnerotomachia Poliphili" (Wien, 1872. 8vo.), would perhaps have been more excellent, if the writer had been acquainted with the work of his precursor Fiorillo.



From the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili. Venice, Aldus Manutius, 1499.

been needed, to grasp, and render with full mastery, the suggestions of the story. He lacked the necessary vividness of imagination, and the power of independent conception: and the chief element of weakness in his compositions sprang from his painfully anxious endeavours to reproduce the letter of the text. For all that, he succeeded in creating a series of the most delightful and charming pictures, delicately designed, and thoroughly fulfilling the conditions of outline-work. The lines are sharp, and well balanced; the contours are modelled with extreme care and purity, as well from the inner as from the outer edges of the heavy strokes. The intention of the designer was admirably seconded by the engraver, whose work is carried out with masterly effect. A few cuts are of poorer quality, and were either more carelessly executed, or perhaps are due to an inferior hand.

The clear and simple style of the illustrations harmonises perfectly with the elegant Roman type of the text; and the book is indisputably one of the most beautiful that have ever issued from the press.

A description of the subjects will not be considered necessary here, especially as the *Hypnerotomachia* is by no means a rare book. It was reprinted in 1545, at the Aldine press, of which Paulus Manutius was then the responsible head; with the same woodcuts and type as the original edition, but without most of the decorative initials. The second edition is greatly inferior in beauty to that of 1499, by reason of unskilful workmanship in printing the blocks, and the consequent production of pale and poor impressions. A free translation of the text, in French, was published by Jacques Kerver, at Paris, in three editions, dated 1546, 1554, and 1561; and appeared again in 1600. The illustrations in the French "Poliphile" are free copies of the Italian woodcuts, and many of them exhibit the charming elegance which distinguished the art of Lyons in the sixteenth century. They are ascribed to Jean Cousin by Firmin-Didot in his essay upon that artist.

The question as to who was the creator of the woodcuts in the Venetian Hypnerotomachia, has been frequently propounded, and discussed with great variety of opinion. To Mantegna, "Bellini"

(Which of the artists of that name?), Botticelli, and even to Raffaelle, they have been ascribed in succession.

Of all those old conjectures, the assignment to "Bellini" comes nearest to the truth, in so far as it is an undoubted fact that the Poliphilo master belongs to the Bellini school. The other suppositions hardly require any serious refutation. The Venetian origin of the book, and the signature "b" which appears on two of the cuts near the beginning, seem to make for "Bellini". A notion which occasionally cropped up formerly, that Sandro Botticelli sketched the designs of the Poliphilo, was also based upon that letter b.

We have already drawn attention to the mark "b" found upon Venetian vignettes, and it has been seen that the series of illustrated books in which it appears, begins with the Malermi Bible of 1491. If we compare the woodcuts in that Bible, those in the Terence of 1497, — in short, the illustrations of the "b" group, — with those of the Poliphilo, it will be found that the same principle of design, in clear fine outlines, with or without slight edge-shading, prevails in them all. Moreover, they all exhibit the same type, as regards composition, and the same style of drawing the human form. The artist seems to have striven to render his groupings as simple as possible, disposing them in such a way as to avoid the overlaying of the contours, and to produce a certain aspect of calm and ceremonious dignity in the arrangement of the figures. At the same time, the effect of life and movement is ably realised, although there is something of weakness and indecision in the drawing of the forms, in spite of the care with which their action is indicated.

In the Malermi Bible, and in the other books of the "b" group, we have observed a lack of uniform quality in the engraving of the various vignettes; as for the illustrations in the Hypnerotomachia, the excellence of their technical treatment raises them above all similar productions of the Venetian wood-engravers.

We must not omit to state that a monogram, which partly resembles the "b", but combines with it an "M" and a superscribed "o", appeared upon a Venetian woodcut shortly after the year 1500. This cut represents John the Baptist, and was used as a printer's

mark by the typographer Johannes Tacuino de Tridino. It evidently conveys a punning allusion to his baptismal name, and was employed for the first time (to our knowledge) on B. Brugnoli's edition of "Tullii de Officiis, Amicitia, Senectute. Paradoxa ejusdem", in 1506 (Folio).

It was, assuredly, not the master of the Poliphilo from whom Tacuino obtained the sketch for his woodcut mark; Benedetto Montagna, whom we have already seen in the capacity of a designer for the woodblock, was probably the owner of the bMo monogram. The harsh figure of the Baptist is more nearly related to the drawing of Montagna and the Veronese school, than to the soft refinement of the master who used the simple b.

The affinity of style between the various woodcuts of the b group, enables us to affirm that the b is not an engraver's, but a designer's mark, the signature in fact of the artist who created all those illustrations.

In looking around for an artist, whose work and whose name would harmonise with that signature and the woodcuts which bear it, we light upon Jacopo de' Barbari. That he lived in Venice about that time is a recognised fact, and we have certain testimony that he was occupied in connexion with engraving, both on wood and copper. Modern research has already cleared away all doubt that the two names, "Jacopo de' Barbari", and "Jakob Walch", which are found in the writings of his contemporaries, refer to one and the same individual.

It is frequently supposed that "Walch" was a surname given to the artist by Germans, and equivalent in meaning to "Wälsch" or "Wälscher", a word which signifies Gaul, Italian, or in a wider sense, foreigner.[1] At the same time, it is also generally accepted that "de' Barbari" or "de Barbaris" was not his proper family-name. Dürer calls him "Jacob Walch". In the Journal of his tour to the Netherlands, he states, with regard to his visit to the Archduchess Marguerite of Austria at Brussels, that — "There

[1] It was applied by the Germanic conquerors of England in the fifth century to the Britons, and has remained the designation of the modern people of Cambria.

saw I other good things of Johann Jacob Walch. I asked my lady after master Jacob's little book, but she said she had bestowed it on her painter." Here, Walch appears as a regular family name. If Dürer had meant to imply the *Foreigner*, or the *Italian*, he would probably have called him "Jacob der Walch". Moreover,



Tacuino de Tridino in Venice.

it seems to me quite unproven that "Walch" was ever used to mean "Italian". The form of the word in that sense, with Dürer, was "Wahle", as we see from the Journal just referred to — "I also drew the portrait of the hook-nosed Wahle *(Italian)* named Opitius."

We find in Venice, between 1479 and 1482, a German printer who describes himself in the colophons of the books produced

by him, as Georg Walch. At Nuremberg, in 1442, a certain "N. Walch" is mentioned as a resident artist, engaged in working at the paintings in the town-hall.

There is surely a remarkable coincidence in the fact that two bearers of the name of Walch should have been found in Venice about the same time — that is, the printer Georg, and our Barbari-Walch. If Walch were merely a surname, or nickname, meaning *Italian*, how is it that Germans could have borne it in Italy? We may at least conjecture that Walch-Barbari was of German origin, and had only altered his name to Barbari at some more recent date. In Dürer's unprinted preface to his *Proportionslehre*, he speaks of Jacobus as "a good and pleasing master, Venetian by birth"; and the *anonymus* of Morelli and Geldenhauer mentions him in similar fashion as "Jacobo Barberino Veneziano". We can scarcely therefore retain any doubt as to the artist having been born at Venice. The family-name of Walch may have fallen into oblivion afterwards, and it is to be noticed that Neudörffer (A. D. 1546) speaks of him already as "Jacob, named Walch, a painter".

From some recently discovered records of the time, we learn that Barbari had left Venice, in or before 1500, to enter into the service of the Emperor Maximilian, as "Illuminator". It is not ascertained what the labours were which his imperial patron commissioned him to perform at Nuremberg, but we know that he remained in that city till 1504. He is next found in the Netherlands, engaged with Mabuse in the decoration of the castle of Zuytborch, for Count Philip, the natural son of Philip Duke of Burgundy. In 1500, he was "Valet de chambre et peintre attaché à la princesse", in the service of the Archduchess Marguerite, Regent of the Netherlands, a place which he seems to have retained until his death in 1516.

To his Teutonic extraction we may probably attribute the intermediate position between German and Italian art which was held by Barbari-Walch, and also his manifold connexion with Germany. The most rational presumption is, that he was born at Venice of German parents named Walch. From the very outset of his career, he seems to have been more familiar with



A FRAGMENT OF THE LARGE VIEW OF VENICE, BY JACOPO DE' BARBARI
REDUCED FACSIMILE

the practice of engraving, both on copper and wood, than most of his Venetian contemporaries.

We are firmly persuaded, almost to the extent of conviction, that it was our Jacopo who produced one of the largest and most remarkable woodcuts that have ever been executed. This is a view of Venice, completed in the year 1500.

A panorama, quite two metres in breadth, and more than a metre and a half in height, it is a masterpiece of coup-d'œil and clearness of arrangement; and, considering the novelty of such a circumstance at that time, noteworthy in the highest degree for the correctness of perspective. The design is a middle term between a plan of horizontal projection and a bird's-eye prospect from an imaginary point of view. Not one of the many, and often very comprehensive, pictures of the same kind, in which, during the course of the sixteenth century, most of the chief cities and towns of Europe were pourtrayed, excels or even equals this view of Venice in its perfect achievement.

The labour occupied three years. Anton Kolb of Nuremberg, the merchant at whose expense it was executed, petitioned the Signoria of Venice to be allowed to sell the woodcut everywhere, without tax or duty, at three ducats for each copy. He was guilty of no exaggeration in basing his request upon the incredible difficulties which he had had to overcome in order to obtain a correct design; by reason of the vast comprehensiveness of the work, the unprecedented size of the sheets of paper, the novelty of the artistic method applied to producing impressions from blocks of such dimensions, and the labour of setting all the parts evenly together — matters which the public would hardly understand how to estimate justly (. . . le qual cose forse non essendo per suo valor stimate dal zente[1]).

Beyond the numerals indicating the date (1500), no mark or monogram is found upon the woodcut; for we cannot assume that the caduceus held aloft by Mercury as he is seen flying through the air, in the upper portion of the view, is intended for

[1] Harzen, from Cicogna's work "Delle Iscrizioni Veneziane". Venice, 1824-43. 4to.

the artist's mark, even though it is true that Barbari used it as such in his copper-engravings.

There is no testimony, or direct intimation of any kind, available to prove that Jacopo was the author of the view of Venice. We have nothing documentary to cite except the words in Dürer's letter to Pirkheimer (Campe, Reliquien, p. 32) — "Antoni Kolb swore an oath there lived no better painter on earth than Jacob". It has besides been recently discovered that Kolb and Barbari were summoned together to Nuremberg, for the service of the Emperor.[1]

The historical basis on which rests the ascription of the large view of Venice to Barbari, is nothing more than the above mentioned instances of a connexion between him and Kolb, and the presumption that he was the "Meister Jacob" so enthusiastically eulogized by that publisher. However readily these items of circumstantial evidence may lead to the conclusion drawn from them, they would certainly be insufficient to establish Barbari's authorship of the view in question, if the figures of Neptune and Mercury on the woodcut did not furnish unmistakeable testimony of the fact, in the manner in which they are designed.

Those mythological representations exhibit the mode of drawing the human frame which may be remarked in Barbari's copper-prints and paintings; namely, the effeminate and boneless figures, and his peculiarly vague anatomical notions with regard to the colligation of the limbs. The delineation of bodily form is, for all that, fairly accurate; but it evinces no more than the mere study of externals. We note a remarkable contrast to these and to other examples of his figure-drawing, in the powerfully energetic heads which represent the eight winds, blowing with distended cheeks in the sky above the city in our woodcut. From these and similar manifestations of his quality, it would hardly have been anticipated that Barbari possessed sufficient force of character

[1] See the documents cited by Thausing in his work on Dürer. Kolb was probably wanted for the purpose of utilising, in the work which the Emperor desired to be performed, the great practical experience gained by him, during the production of the View of Venice, in the art of printing blocks of large size.

and artistic temperament, to work out the interminable architectural and perspective details of the colossal *Veduta*, with so much clearness and sharpness of design. Two other large woodcuts, described for the first time by Bartsch[1] and ascribed by him to Barbari, exhibit so plainly the style of his drawing that they may, without hesitation, be regarded as the work of his hand. A fully detailed account of them is given by Bartsch, and also by Passavant (Peintre Graveur, III, p. 141). The one, which is of nearly rectangular form, 39 centimetres high by 49½ in breadth, represents a battle in a hilly landscape, between naked men and a host of satyrs. The other is larger (127 centimetres in length by 29 in height) and is executed as a frieze decoration. It is combined from the impression of three separate blocks, and exhibits a sort of triumphal procession, in which Cupid, holding a moneybag in his arms, is sitting in a car drawn by sirens, and surrounded by a number of other personages and allegorical figures.

On the first of those two woodcuts, we observe a man holding a trident with a label containing the letters Q. R. F. E. V. This inscription is read by Bartsch as signifying "quod recte factum esse videtur"; but whether he is correct or not must remain a moot question. On the larger woodcut, the same initials are repeated; but, in addition, we find men bearing a tablet containing the words "Virtus excelsa cupidinem ere regnantem domat".

The latter engraving belongs decidedly to the cycle of allegorical *Triumphi*, formed by those recompositions and continuations of the Triumphs of Petrarch which, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, furnished artists with favorite material for the exercise of their powers. Some day perhaps, we may be enabled to trace the literary source of this, and of other compositions of the same kind which still remain unelucidated. There is a possibility that the fight between men and satyrs was intended to symbolise the struggle between Virtue and Vice, but the matter remains as yet incapable of demonstration.

From the artistic point of view, those two woodcuts do not occupy so high a place as the prospect of Venice. The drawing

[1] Die Kupferstichsammlung der K. K. Hofbibliothek in Wien. Vienna, 1854. 8vo. Nos. 366, 367.

of the figures and the scenery is more slovenly, less finished, and meaner in performance. In the landscape, especially in the background, the German influence reveals itself even more than in other works by Barbari. The technical work of the wood-engraver is decidedly less delicate, less sharp and clear, and evidently by hands inferior in skill to those which executed the large View.

Reviewing the appearance of those large woodcuts, which seem far more like the learned concoction of a scholar's brain, than the independent conception of an artist's genius, we feel impelled to inquire the reason which induced Barbari to design them. They were portion, perhaps, of the labours undertaken by him for Maximilian during the years 1501—1504, in which he was actively employed as the Emperor's "Illuminator" at Nuremberg; and they may have formed the opening tableaux of the series of Triumphs and Pageants, in devising which, as we know, that sovereign and his circle of friends, literary and artistic, spent so much time and ingenuity.

If the inference from the b initial which is found on two of the Poliphilo cuts, leads us immediately to consider Barbari as the owner of that signature; on the other hand, when we compare the illustrations in that book with the large woodcuts mentioned above, we are struck by the extraordinary paucity of such points of resemblance as might indicate their common origin. The separate woodcuts, by their large dimensions and isolation of character, furnish, it is true, anything but a favorable basis of comparison with the small designs of the book, linked as these are by a current of successive and interdependent ideas. In the view of Venice, everything was drawn scrupulously from nature, in order to satisfy the critical eyes of the inhabitants, who knew their city well. Every means which the art of wood-engraving then afforded, was utilised, we may even say refined upon, so as to give chromatic effect to the picture. The distribution of light and shadow is powerfully marked, and even the sheets of water are divided into distinct spaces of darkness and lustre. The figures of Mercury and Neptune, as well as the heads representing the Winds, are likewise shaded thus, and the bodies and limbs

are modelled in relief by masses of fine strokes and hatchings, in the style of copper-engraving.[1]

The two large allegorical woodcuts are, from their size, no less unsuitable than the View, to be set in comparison with the relatively small designs of the Poliphilo. In them, likewise, the technical method of execution on the block, seems to indicate that they belong to a different period of the artist's career, from that in which the Poliphilo illustrations of 1499 and the View of 1500, were produced.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the master of the Hypnerotomachia, whoever he was, had been trained in the practice of that style of book-illustration which was in prevalent use at Venice, and naturally performed his work in the regular fashion of outline-drawing, with all its customary methods of treatment. A man of such versatile artistic temperament as we may reasonably assume that Barbari was endowed with, would have found little difficulty in adapting himself to the most varied conditions, and would have been able to work, now in one style, then in another. He could not have had the tact and originality, which — on the assumption that he was indeed the master "b" of the Malermi Bible and the Poliphilo, — he undoubtedly possessed, if he had failed to perceive that the outline-manner would not be suitable for the large View. Moreover, the view of Florence, then ten years old, must have lain before him as an example, and an indication of the mode in which such work ought to be performed.

The differences of technical treatment, in the Venice view, and the Poliphilo illustrations, are so great, that the marks of

[1] The close fidelity to nature shown in the view of Venice, may be realised even at the present time. In the first issue of the woodcut, the tower of St. Mark is cut short with a blunt round roof. This was the temporary covering constructed when the old spire had been destroyed by lightning in 1498. The second issue of the engraving exhibits the high stone roof which was built between 1511 and 1514, and which is still in existence. The date of 1500, which had appeared on the original impression, was suppressed in the second issue. The blocks were worked again, subsequently, but in these latest impressions the publisher re-established the old low roof, in order to give his copies the fraudulent semblance of original proofs. The blocks have not perished, but are still preserved, although sadly worm-eaten, in the Museo Correr at Venice.

affinity between those two works, although certainly not absent, disappear entirely before the numerous dissimilitudes. But this is only at first sight; closer examination will discover traces of a certain essential relationship.

The manner in which cloud-forms are drawn, in the Hypnerotomachia, for example, in the woodcuts on folio E6 and E7, is conspicuously similar to the mode of delineating the clouds which surround Mercury, and the Winds, on the View of Venice. In both places, they are round, rolling, shapes, wholly unshaded, and formed by bold strokes with peculiar indentations. Cloud-forms, exactly of this sort, will hardly be met with anywhere else. The treatment of shading, upon smooth wall-surfaces, is also very much alike in both works.

Even between Barbari's copper-prints and the woodcuts of the Hypnerotomachia, very few analogies can be discovered.

Hartmann was the first to observe that the copper-prints of Barbari belong probably to a later phase of the artist's work; and that their appearance should perhaps be dated during the period of his residence in the Netherlands (Naumann, Archiv). The critic deduced his opinion from the watermarks of the paper on which the impressions of the prints were usually struck off. This reasoning is not conclusive as to the time at which those engravings were designed or even incised upon the copper, since Barbari would certainly have taken with him, on removing to the Netherlands, whatever plates he had prepared. Thus, most of the impressions which have come down to us may have been taken in the Low Countries, even irrespectively of the thin and delicate style of engraving, suggesting, as it does, the influence of Lucas van Leyden, and the manner of the dilettante engravers of the Netherlands who belonged to the school of Mabuse. The purely Italian mode of handling the graver is seen in but a few of Barbari's plates; the Madonna (Bartsch, Le Mait. au Caducée, VII, p. 519, Nr. 6) shews it to some extent.

Whatever the fact may have been, it is undeniable that the Poliphilo woodcuts are drawn with far more ability, and are much more Bellinesque, than Barbari's copper-prints; but there is, at the same time, a considerable analogy of style between them in

the delineation of heads. In both, we observe the same strong development of the occiput, the same type of features, and the same peculiar form of the nose, springing large and broad directly from the forehead.

Undoubtedly, all the details alleged here would not, of themselves, suffice to identify Barbari with the master of the Poliphilo. For that proof, more cogent reasons would be required than the mere adducement of occasional resemblances of treatment.

The master "b" of the Hypnerotomachia cannot be judged from that work only. He was also the creator of a considerable series of illustrations, all of which do not perhaps bear his signature. The woodcuts of the 1497 Ovid are so thoroughly akin to those of the Poliphilo, in their drawing and composition, and in the attitudes and motions of the figures, that there can be little hesitation about assigning them to the same artist's hand. On the other hand, the circumstance that those Ovid cuts bear a different monogram, — one which we have endeavored to assign to Jacob of Strassburg — and, more especially, the particular position occupied by this second "Jacobus" in reference to early Venetian wood-engraving, combine to increase the difficulty of elucidating the problem which lies before us.

In the Ovid we observe now and then, — in the single figures in the fourth book, for instance — a somewhat closer affinity of manner, than in the Poliphilo, to the authenticated paintings and copper-prints of Barbari; but most of the Ovid woodcuts harmonise as little as those of the Hypnerotomachia with the recognised type of that artist's work.

If the master "b" was, as we believe, the designer of the Ovid pictures, he was likewise, in all probability, the artist who drew the cuts for the Ketham of 1493. The latter illustrations are, as regards the quality of design, and the technical execution, at least equal to those of the Poliphilo. The larger scale of the drawing conduced to the achievement of a more complete success with the heads of the figures, and in other details; but, apart from such diversities as these, which merely grew out of the mode of delineation, we discover in the Ketham compositions, the same motives of position and attitude as in the Poliphilo, and

a thoroughly similar style of conception. In the Ketham, however, we find a much closer suggestion of the manner of Gentile Bellini, than of Barbari's.

In spite of all this, we cannot resist the notion that the most eminent designer of Venetian woodcuts between 1490 and 1500, was no other than the illuminator, Jacopo de' Barbari. We know that he quitted Venice in the latter year. It was just about the same time that the method of outline-engraving, and the cognate style of drawing, which till then had been characteristic of Venetian woodcuts, fell into disuse. The last illustrative work of that kind, at least the latest which is known to us, appeared in the above-mentioned edition of the Settanta Novelle of Sabadino degli Arienti, in 1504. After that date, there was no further production of cuts like those of the Malermi Bible and the Hypnerotomachia.

From a man of Barbari's peculiar disposition, sudden and unexpected changes of style might naturally have been expected. Other artists, who combined the practice of painting and of illumination in equal measure, or who were preeminently masters of both copper and wood engraving, have before now exhibited signal instances of radical alteration in their characteristics. Marcantonio Raimondi, Benedetto Montagna, and Lucas of Leyden are cases in point.

After Barbari's departure, about the commencement of the sixteenth century, Venetian wood-engraving seems to have sunk into a kind of stagnation. The only movement was in the continued production of the ordinary illustrations for books of devotion, which was still carried on in the workshops of Vavassore and other men of the same class; until Ugo da Carpi made his appearance and gave the art an entirely new developement, based upon the principles which guided the profession of Painting.

Typography was introduced into Milan by Filippo di Lavagna, in 1469. Ten years later, there issued from his press a book illustrated with copper-engravings, a small religous tract called the *Summula di pacifica Conscientia* by Fra Pacifico di Novara.[1]



From the Quadragesimale. Milan, 1479.
The Author's Portrait.

Of the three engravings in the *Summula*, only one possesses any artistic interest. It represents the virtues of the Madonna,

[1] The only copy known is in the Ambrosian library at Milan. Folio a 1: Iesumaria. El Titulo (E) l nome de Christo . . . comencia el prologo in la Sequente opereta dicta Sumula ho uero sumeta de pacifica conscientia . . . Folio D 8 verso: Pacifici Nouarensis . . . per G. Brebiani in impressione recognitum et Philippum de Lauagnia Mediolanensis impressum . . . opusculum . . . 9°. Kalendas Apriles en *(sic)* uigilia Dominice Incarnationis expletum est Anno 1479 . . . 4to.

symbolised as a fourfold crown; with the Annunciation in smaller figures above it. The execution of the print in fine hatched work is clear and firm; but, beyond the general characteristics of the Italian art of the period, there is so little distinctive trace of any particular school, that we cannot be sure whether it was indeed a native product of Milanese talent, or was merely a plate procured elsewhere for the use of the printer. From the circumstance that Lavagna illustrated his press-work with copper-prints, we might assume that wood-engraving was still in its infancy, at Milan. It was not quite unknown and unpractised, for all that, since Leonard Pachel and Ulrich Scinzenceller printed in the same year (1479), in that city, the *Breviarium totius juris canonici* of Paulus Florentinus, which contains a small outline woodcut of much excellence, representing the author at work, within an architectural border.[1] This fancy-portrait is drawn with extreme taste and delicacy, but, although evidently a genuine Milanese performance, it was probably nothing more than the isolated and incidental essay of a clever artist; for, the use of woodcut illustrations, to any considerable extent, is not found to have come into fashion at Milan for several years after that date, in fact, not till after the beginning of the last decade of the century. Even then, the art was of a totally different character from that which marks the small woodcut of 1479.

From about the year 1492 onwards, the practice of illustrating books with woodcuts was regularly pursued at Milan; and the same was the case with regard to the typographical productions of other towns that lay within the influence of Milanese art. A relatively small school of Milanese wood-engraving came then into existence, and began a career of continuous activity, producing not only work for the printers, but also single detached prints. It developed indeed a specific character, marked out with some

[1] The initials M · P. F. O. S. S., under the picture, signify *Magister Paulus Florentinus ordinis Sancti spiritus*. This woodblock seems to have had some strange adventures; as we find it seven years later in an edition of the same work printed in 1486 at Memmingen in Germany by Albert Kune. Rothscholtzius reproduces this little woodcut in his Insignia Bibliopolarum, taking it erroneusly for the mark of the Memmingen printer.



The Triumph of Time. From the Petrarch of Milan, Zaroto, 1494.

distinctness, but never rose to the large comprehensiveness of the Venetian school, or to the peculiar greatness of the Florentine which formed in itself a cycle of artistic culture.

The few large illustrations in Franchini Gafori's *Theorica Musicæ*, printed in 1492 by Mantegazza (— "Philippus Mantegatius" is the form used by himself —) are very coarse and primitive. Far better, and of considerable interest from various points of view, are the six folio-sized *Triumfi* which appear in the Petrarch printed in 1494, at Milan, by Antonio Zaroto of Parma. The engravings of the Florentine edition furnished the compositions for Zaroto's book, as for others; but there is a remarkable connexion between the cuts in the Milanese volume, and those in the Venetian Petrarch mentioned above (p. 94). The first two Triumphi of the former — the Triumph of Love and the Triumph of Chastity — were imitated from the corresponding illustrations in the latter; but the other four, namely, the Triumphs of Death, Fame, Time, and Christ, were copied directly, and with tolerable accuracy of reproduction, from the Florentine copper-prints. It is evident that these four were not drawn by the same hand as the former two. The designer surpassed his Florentine model in a certain energy which marks the composition, but he was very far indeed from attaining to the delicacy of execution observable in the copper-engraving. He succeeded, however, in rendering all the details of the original happily enough in his rough woodcut style. His four pictures are framed within borders of appropriate character; different from those which enclose the first two Triumphi, and which, like the cuts within them, were borrowed from the Venice edition.

The curious circumstance of two different sets of engravings, — copper-prints, and woodcuts — having been taken by the illustrator of Zaroto's Petrarch as the patterns for his own work, may be explained by conjecturing that the set of copperplates only fell into his hands, after he had finished the cutting of his first two blocks in imitation of the woodcut models; or else, that he possessed no more than four of the Florentine prints, and was obliged to have recourse to the Venetian woodcuts of 1491 to obtain the designs of his first two pictures.

A further progress of the art in Milan was evinced in the *editio princeps* of Franchini Gafori's *Practica Musicæ,* printed in 1496 by Guillaume Le Signerre of Rouen (Guillermus Signerre Rothomagensis). It is a small folio volume, with a woodcut on the title-page representing the nine Muses and an allegorised picture of the harmony of the spheres. Two of the leaves of text have ornamental borders; one of which (folio a *recto*) illustrates the Power of Music, in a design of Amphion (compelling the walls to rise round Thebes), Arion, and Orpheus; and the other (folio c c *recto*) exhibits Gaforio giving instruction to his pupils. The style of drawing in those cuts is decidedly quite Milanese; their technical execution, in its thin and finical appearance, resembles early Venetian work. The blocks may have been cut by workmen from Venice; — in which way, probably, Milan derived a portion of her artistic growth from that city.

A similar note of Venetian influence upon Milanese technique is seen in the vignette woodcuts which decorate the *Legendario di Santi padri historiado vulgar,* printed by Ulrich Scinzenzeler at Milan in 1497.[1] The illustrations, some of them very charmingly composed, were evidently designed by a Milanese artist, who took the cuts of the Malermi Bible, and other books of the same kind, for his models, and imitated them very happily.

From the press of Guillaume Le Signerre, who had printed the 1496 Gafori, there issued in 1498, a work in which the text seems almost lost in the multitude of the illustrations. This is a religious picture-book, intitled the *Specchio di Anima,* to which, in the number of its decorative woodcuts, there hardly exists a rival, in the Italian publications of the fifteenth century. On the forty four leaves of which it consists, there are seventy eight cuts, each occupying the full size of a large quarto page.[2]

[1] Folio a 1: *intitulation,* Legendario di Santi istoriado vulgar. *At the end:* Finisse legende de Sancti composte per el . . . frate Iacopo de Voragine . . . traducte in lingua vulgar per . . . nicholao de manerbi veneto . . . stampate in Milano per Magistro Vlderico Scinzenzeler MCCCCLXXXXVII. 4to. From the copy in the Vienna Hofbibliothek.

[2] Ferraro (Ioh. Petro de Vigevano) Specchio di Anima. *Folio 1 recto:* Il Nome di Questo Libro e In Litato *(sic)* Specchio di Anima. *Folio 1 verso:*

Nine leaves at the beginning are given to the story of Adam and Eve; the life and death of Christ are depicted in the remainder. The designs are vigorously executed in coarse thick outlines, with scarcely any touch of shading. The figures are animated and easy; but the expression is frequently surcharged. On the whole, the illustrations of the *Spechio* seem to be the work of a second-rate artist, who was however endowed with original conceptions; but his style is a medley of antiquated forms and newer elements. He was a Milanese, and belonged to the school of Donato Montorfano or some other painter of similar kind. It is not impossible that he had been a miniaturist of manuscripts. We have no direct evidence of any connexion between the illuminators and the wood-engravers, but many circumstances indicate its likelihood; especially, the peculiar mingling of various styles which may be remarked no less in the miniatures of the close of the fifteenth century, than in the woodcuts of the same period.

The technical execution of the woodcuts in the *Spechio* is cramped, and indeed, to some extent, clumsy. The heads and faces, particularly, are disfigured almost to the verge of caricature; and it seems as though various hands, of different degrees of skill, were engaged in the cutting of the blocks. These workmen can scarcely have been from Venice, as there is no suggestion of the Venetian manner in their work. Le Signerre may have employed only Milanese craftsmen in the production of his illustrated books.

A large proportion of the woodcuts of the *Spechio* had a new application in the following year, 1499, when they were inserted by Le Signerre in a different book. This was the *Tesauro Spirituale*, a volume which is now equally rare with the *Spechio*. It is unmentioned by the professional bibliographers, and the only copy known to us is preserved in the Berlin Print-room.[1]

Al . . . domino Ludovico Mari Spor . . . *Folio 6 verso:* hoc opus lingue ytalice traductum fuit per deuotū Ludouicum besalū Hispanie feliciter scripsit anno . . . 1498. *Folio 44 verso:* Impressum Mediolani per Guillermos le Signerre fratres Rothomagenses MCCCCLXXXXVIII di XXIII martii. Impensis Johanis de bifignādis de Vigleuano. Laus deo Amen. With the printer's mark of the Signerres. From the copy in the Ambrosian library at Milan.

[1] The title is xylographic and runs thus: — Tesauro Spirituale: | cum le epistole et | euangelii histori | ate: cum le meditatione de sancto Bonaventura.

In additions to the cuts borrowed from the *Specchio*, the *Tesauro* contains a number of new ones which are not by the same hand as the others. They are finer, and mark a clear advance in the knowledge of design; while it is evident that the execution of the block-cutting was entrusted to workmen more skilled than those who had laboured on the *Specchio*. The technical treatment of the new cuts is also different, in so far as they exhibit a particular method of shading with slanting parallel lines, tending to harmonise the general effect. The figures are smaller than in the *Specchio*, and disposed with greater ease and more mastery of composition. The designs are enclosed within ornamental borders, worked in white upon a black ground. The border is omitted in the facsimile which we give of one of the newer illustrations from the *Tesauro*.

At Milan, as well as elsewhere, we find an edition of Æsop among the earliest illustrated books produced by the printers. Le Signerre published one in 1498, containing Accio Zucco's text, with woodcuts which are copies of those in the Venice Æsop of 1492, and by no means ill done. The designs in the preliminary life of Æsop, are independent creations, and not without elegance. They were evidently drawn by the same hand as the better cuts of the *Tesauro*. But the blockcutter's work in the Æsop is irregular, and to some extent defective.[1]

In the same year 1498, the Signerres transferred their press to Saluzzo. Louis II, Marquis of Saluzzo, a prince remarkable for his learning and his love of classical antiquity, had founded an academy there, in which he occasionally read erudite dissertations of his own. He had endeavored to introduce printing into

Verso: Alo . . . domino Lodouico Maria Sphor . . . Duca de Milano . . . Io. Petro Ferraro da Vigleuano *At the end:* Impressum Mediolani per Guilermos le Signerre fratres Rothomagenses. MCCCCLXXXXVIII. die XVIIII. Martii. Impensis Iohannis de bifignandis de Vigleuano. 4to. With the printers's mark of Signerre. Sign. a-m. 73 leaves. 63 woodcuts of full-page size.

[1] Aesopus. *Folio 1 recto:* Le fabule de Esopo vulgare e latine Historiade. *Folio 1 verso:* Accii Zuchi . . in Aesopii fabulas interpretatio . . . *At the end of the Life:* Impressum mediolani p Guillermos le Signerre fratres Rothomagenses . . . 1498 . . . die quidecimo mensis septembri. Impensis Gotardi de ponte. 4to. An imperfect copy in the Ambrosian library.



THE CONVERSION OF MARY MAGDALEN
FROM THE "THESAURO SPIRITUALE", OF JOH. PETR FERRARO DA VIGLEVANO, MILAN, SIGNERRE, 1499
AFTER THE ONLY KNOWN COPY, IN THE ROYAL PRINT-ROOM AT BERLIN



St. Jerome. From Vivaldus: "De Veritate Contricionis", Saluzzo, Le Signerre, 1503.

his little capital long before. The Turinese printer, Giovanni Fabri, took up his abode in Saluzzo in 1479, but only for a short while. Martino della Valle, another printer from Turin, followed Fabri in 1481; and in 1498, the brothers Le Signerre, as we have said, took up their residence there.[1]

Two books which issued from the press of Saluzzo are decorated with woodcuts of unusual excellence. They are both works of one author, the Dominican monk Giovanni Ludovico Vivaldo, who was the Marquis's trusty councillor.

The first of the two works, a theological treatise on contrition, was printed in 1503, by the order of the Marquis, and at his expense, according to the statement in the colophon. It is also dedicated to him.[2]

At the beginning of the book, there is an excellent woodcut representing St. Jerome as an anchorite. By its design, as well as by the method of its engraving, this fine illustration is seen to belong to the Milanese school, notwithstanding some suggestions of Veronese influence, particularly in the ornamental border, which is very rich and elegant. The engraving is done with great care, although the lines are simple and bold; and the effect produced is one of concentrated power. In its treatment, this woodcut reminds us of the prints which are usually ascribed to "Battista del Porto" of Modena, and to which we shall make further reference in the sequel.

Some years later, — in 1507, — Vivaldus published the second book alluded to above. It is superior even to the other, in the beauty of its woodcut adornment; and was printed by Jacobus de Circis and Sixtus de Somachis at the press which they worked, for a short time, at Saluzzo. The title of the book is *Opus Regale*;

[1] Litta's statement (Famiglie celebri) that Erhard Ratdolt was printing at Saluzzo in 1495, is based upon some misconception. Ratdolt had quitted Italy long before that date, and was then actively employed in typography at Nuremberg.

[2] Vivaldus (Jo. Lud.) *Folio 1 recto:* Aureum Opus de Veritate Contricionis in quo mirifica documenta eterne Salutis aperiuntur. *Fol. 160 verso:* Preclarum Opus de Veritate contricionis Salutijs impressum mandato ac espensis Ilustrissimi ac Clementissimi principis Ludovici Marchionis Salutiar' ac Viceregis Neapolitani Meritissimi p. Guillermu et Guillermum le Signerre fratres Rothomagenses Anno Salutis 1503 die primo Julij Feliciter. — With the printers' mark.

its text is a series of politico-philosophical essays, preceded by a letter of condolence addressed to Marguerite de Foix, the widow of the Marquis whose death had taken place in 1504.

The prince's portrait is prefixed to the epistle. It shows us, in profile, and looking towards the right, a fine intellectual head, which stands out in strong relief from a background of dense shadow. The expression of the face, which is somewhat ascetic and melancholy, harmonises with the inscription beneath it, — the words of Job (IX, 25) "Dies mei velociores fuerunt cursore; fugerunt, et non viderunt bonum". The design and the engraving alike are of exquisite perfection. The portrait was evidently drawn by a master of the Milanese school; the block-cutter's performance is also Milanese in character. The principle of delineation apparent in the accessory ornament, and the technical manner in which it is worked out, remind us of the woodcuts in the illustrated books produced at Milan by the brothers Le Signerre. The other two fullpage cuts in the *Opus Regale* are of similar artistic character. One of them, prefixed to a "tractatus de laudibus trium liliorum", is a picture of St. Louis kneeling at prayer, with a seraph who bears his crown, hovering above him; while the Madonna with the Infant Jesus appears within a halo of glory. The second represents St. Thomas attended in his cell by two angels. These two illustrations are executed with the utmost delicacy in regular outline-style; and the type of Milanese art is clearly expressed in them as in the first woodcut. It must remain doubtful whether the cuts in the two works of Vivaldus are to be regarded as essays of an independent artistic movement at Saluzzo, or as examples of design and workmanship from another source — Milanese perhaps — obtained for the use of Saluzzan typographers. Probability tells for the latter assumption, especially as the engravings in the *Opus Regale*, and the *De veritate contricionis* are the only specimens known to us of woodcut-illustration in books printed at Saluzzo.[1]

[1] Gafori's work "de Harmonia musicorum instrumentorum", printed at Milan in 1513, contains some verses (quoted in Le Roux de Lincy's *Recherches sur Grolier*) which show that Guillaume Le Signerre of Rouen was the engraver (figurarum celator) of the woodcuts in that volume.



Portrait of Louis II, Marquis of Saluzzo. From Vivaldus "Opus Regale". Saluzzo, 1507.

The quattrocento style of wood-engraving survived at Milan till the years of the sixteenth century were running their course; — much longer indeed than in Venice. The Milanese school, the first dated productions of which made their appearance about 1492, seems to have enjoyed a continuous existence down to 1520, and to have long conserved at least a portion of its distinctive characteristics. The survival of the old system is, for example, evinced in the title-woodcut of the *Opus de confirmatione vite b. Francisci*, published in 1513. It represents St. Francis bearing the cross which he has taken from the shoulders of the Saviour; while he follows in the footsteps of his divine Master. In this cut we note all the forms of Milanese wood-engraving in the fifteenth century; little modified, except that the figures are slightly more rounded and less harsh.[1]

It was not till a relatively late period, that the woodcuts in dated books began to show indications of Lionardo da Vinci's influence upon art. A design of the Birth of the Saviour, very Lionardesque in style, is found in the *De Imperio militantis Ecclesie* of Isidorus de Isolanis, printed in 1517. The engraver's work is highly effective, with its broad black masses of shadow, approximating to the method of Florentine technique. Others of the illustrations in that book are marked by the same kind of treatment as the early Milanese examples in the *Specchio di Anima;* but they may have been printed from older blocks already used in some work now unknown to us.

In the group of Milanese woodcuts of what may be called the Lionardesque school, we must include the pretty outline-engravings which appear in a little book, printed in 1518, on the *Miracles of St. Veronica;*[2] and finally the illustrations in the "Vitruvius" of Cesare Cesariano, which was published in 1521 at Como, but is to be regarded as a genuine Milanese production.

[1] Bartolomeo de Pisis, Opus de confirmatione vite beati Francisci ad vitā Duc. Ihs. Christi . . . *At the end:* Impressum Mediolani in edibus Zanoti Castilionei, 1513. 4to.

[2] Veronica Vigo, Inexplicabilis Mysterii gesta Beate Veronicæ Virginis præclarissimi Monasterii Sanctæ Marthæ urbis Mediolani. *At the end:* Apud Gotardum Ponticum . . . 1518. Die III. Aprilis. 4to.

The strongly marked Lionardesque manner, in combination with fine and vigorous drawing, which we observe in a number of the cuts of the Vitruvius, give a special value to the book. It is the latest work of Italian wood-engraving in which the quattrocento method is still seen in its full vitality. The execution is somewhat irregular, which was probably caused by Cesariano's abandonment of his labour while the book was passing through the press, so that the printer was obliged to have recourse to other hands to finish it.

Amongst the best of the Vitruvius illustrations (which are nearly all excellent) we may discriminate several which appear to have been transferred to the wood from Lionardo's own drawings; especially in that section of the work which relates to the proportions of the human frame. But even in the architectural and structural designs, Cesariano seems to have striven to reproduce the clearness and the strong accentuation of form which are distinctive qualities of Lionardo's art.

So far as we are in a position to judge, from the woodcuts in printed books, it would appear that wood-engraving found no special demand for its cultivation anywhere in North Italy, outside of Venice and Milan. In those cities alone, a large number of illustrated books issued from the press; and it was only in them that the engravers' workshops developed their productiveness in any traceable real connexion with the local schools of Painting. Many printers in other towns experienced occasionally the need of giving decorative embellishment to their publications, but they caused the work to be done for them elsewhere, or at the most, obtained the blocks from abroad, with the pictures traced upon them, and handed them to native mechanics for the mere process of cutting. Thus we find some books published at Ferrara which are apparently quite Venetian in the character of their illustrations, and others which are no less Florentine in the same way.

A purely Venetian type is seen in the beautiful outline design which decorates the translation of Farghani's Astronomy, printed by Andreas Gallus at Ferrara in 1493 (Gerardus a Sabioneta, Compilatio Astronomica Mahometi Alfragani etc. Hain, 822).

A mixed character, partly Florentine and partly Venetian, appears in the technical treatment of the cuts which are found in the *De pluribus claris selectisque Mulieribus*, of Philippus Bergomensis. This work, the most magnificent production of the Ferrarese press, was published in 1497 by Laurentius de Rubeis at Ferrara; but the large decorative border bears the date of 1493.[1]

The illustrations in the work of Bergomensis are imaginary portraits of famous women; a series beginning with Eve, continued through the most noteworthy female figures of the Bible, of heathen mythology, and of classical antiquity, and concluding with the writer's contemporaries. They are original and charming designs, displaying a rich abundance of variety in conception, costume, and accessories. Occasionally, a cut is repeated and made to serve for the likeness of more than one heroine; but that is a matter of little consequence.

The small portraits, although quite uniform in point of excellence throughout the book, seem to be the work of various hands. In one set, we may recognise the composition, drawing, and execution of the Venetian school; in another, a distinct evidence of relationship to Ferrarese art. Those of the latter kind exhibit, in the treatment of the blocks, a method somewhat nearer to that of the Florentine than to that of the Venetian engravers, in the use of heavy masses of black. The two facsimiles which we give here from the work of Bergomensis will illustrate this difference. The portrait of "Cassandra Fideli" is a specimen of the Venetian group; that of "Paula Gonzaga" exemplifies the Florentine. In the large woodcut which fills the title-page, and represents the

[1] A copy has been described as having the date of 1493 in its colophon, but we are uncertain of the genuineness of the leaf on which that claim is founded. See Quaritch's Catalogue 350, 1883; No. 14352 in the large Catalogue of 1881-87, 6 vols. imp. 8vo. — The book, there stated to be unique, is now in the Fine Art Museum of Boston, U. S.

author submitting his book to Beatrice of Aragon, we see the Ferrarese art of design blending with the technique of Florentine engraving.

The little outline vignettes in an Italian edition of St. Jerome's Epistles (also printed by Lorenzo de Rossi at Ferrara in 1497 — Hain, 8566) are quite Venetian in character. They resemble the inferior sort of the similar illustrations which were produced at Venice; and it is not improbable that they were designed and executed in that city.

Another example of Ferrarese work, of considerable charm, is seen in a small quarto tract containing the funeral oration pronounced at the obsequies of Ercole d'Este I. It was published by Pescennius Franciscus Niger soon after the prince's death. On the title-page, in a border which is executed in the Venetian outline-style, we find a medallion portrait of Ercole I, and, on the last leaf, the figure of a poet, who is writing, while his lute hangs on the branch of a tree beside him.[1]

The title-page of a *Missale*, printed in 1503 at the Carthusian press of Ferrara, contains a woodcut of St. Christopher, designed with great sharpness and precision, and engraved in a delicate but powerful style.[2] This and the preceding instances seem to furnish us with clear proof of the influence exercised by the local school of Art upon the practice of wood-engraving at Ferrara. We may reasonably suppose that a large proportion of such work in that city consisted of single leaves or broad sheets, now lost, beyond all hope of recovery.

Mention has already been made of a Venetian engraved woodblock being carried away to another place (Forli) for impression there. In that case verification was easy; it is more difficult in many other instances in which, at insignificant and remote towns, we light upon woodcuts of which we are morally certain that they

[1] *Title:* Pullata Nigri contio in · D · Herculis · Inferias · D · M · — *It is dated at the end of the preface in a peculiar manner:* Ex ferrario municipio caledis piacularibus: (March 1 ?) a recōciliata diuinitate uolumine qnto: Supra millesim: et quingentenum. — Ercole I died on the 25 January 1505. The pamphlet consists of twelve leaves, 4^{to}.

[2] *Title:* Missale secundum ordinem carthusiensium. *Colophon:* . . . Impressum in Monasterio Chartusie Ferrarie . . . MCCCCCiii die x. Aprilis. Folio.

were executed in Venice. These are mostly single pictures; hardly ever sets of illustrations. Books are occasionally found, decorated with one, or two, seldom more, of such cuts, and bearing imprints of Bologna, Siena, Modena, Ferrara, and other places; without however inducing any notion that wood-engraving was practised to any large extent in those towns in the fifteenth century.



Portrait of Ercole d'Este I.
From the funeral oration by Pesc. Franc. Niger.
Ferrara, 1505.

Those occasional and scattered productions have but a subordinate and slender value as facts in the history of Art; unconnected as they are with the local type of the places in which they were printed, and hopeless as it would be to ascertain their real origin exactly. They are besides, for the most part, works of an inferior sort, a detailed enumeration of which would add no essential touches to our picture of Italian wood-engraving in the fifteenth century.

Of the single-leaf cuts, of North Italian origin, which have survived from the fifteenth century, there are no dated specimens,

and but few which indicate the place of impression. Their position in art-history can only therefore be defined conjecturally. From the examples at present known to us, we are drawn to conclude that a large popular production of woodcuts, in loose leaves and broadsheets, dealing with profane as well as sacred subjects, existed contemporaneously with the illustration of printed books, in North Italy. It was not, of course, so extensive as in Germany, and the traffic was confined to a few places only. We



Portrait of Cassandra Fideli.
From Bergomensis, De Claris Mulieribus. Ferrara 1497.

have far better and readier sources of information concerning Italian copper-engraving in the fifteenth century, than about the contemporary practice of wood-engraving. The copper-prints that have been preserved are much more numerous than the woodcuts; which is not to be wondered at, since they were connected with the names of famous masters, and thus acquired, at a very early date, the reputation of articles of value.

With woodcuts, on the contrary, a circumstance tending to their depreciation was the division of labour between the artistic designer and the essentially mechanical block-cutter. The product

was regarded as really the work of the latter, and hence the general opinion arose that wood-engraving was a meaner species of art. The special chroniclers of the fine arts deemed it beneath their attention to treat upon the subject. As illustrations in books, numbers of cuts have been preserved, not from any recognition of their worth, but simply because their position in printed volumes saved them from destruction; while of the single leaves or broad sheets of the early period, which were little prized at the time of



Portrait of Paula Gonzaga.
From Bergomensis, De Claris Mulieribus. Ferrara, 1497.

their production and regarded with contempt afterwards, nearly every example has perished.

It was the habit of the people in Germany to fasten pictures of saints inside the covers of books and on the inner surface of the lids of clothes-trunks; and that practice has been the means of preserving for us almost every specimen or fragment now existing of the primitive single-leaf woodcuts of German and Dutch origin. There was no such custom in Italy; hence the extraordinary difficulty of finding Italian woodcuts of the earliest period. It is true that the Italians were no less assiduous than the Germans

in pasting pictures of saints upon the doors and walls of their dwellings, but almost everything of that kind has naturally disappeared in both countries.

The Berlin Print-room possesses a number of fragments of Italian woodcuts, some of them of very early date, which, at the demolition of an old house in Bassano, were rescued from the walls of one of the rooms. A large woodcut of the *Madonna surrounded by angels*, which was set above the framework of the door in the same room, is now in the collection of Mr. William Mitchell, in London. Other leaves or fragments of similar kind exist sparsely in various places; all displaying marks of having been used in the same way originally. With exception of the Berlin Print-room, which is relatively the richest in relics of that sort, the public collections of Europe possess but few examples of the primitive essays of Italian wood-engraving.

Out of those scanty remains, we can form but a poor and defective idea of the art as applied to the production of single-leaf pictures in the fifteenth century.

We are ignorant of the extent to which wood-engraving was practised in Italy before the introduction of Printing. With regard to Venice only, it may be inferred, from the decree of the Senate, dated 11. October 1441, forbidding the importation of "printed pictures", that the art was in use there, in its application to various industries, at that period, and must consequently have been cultivated for some considerable time. The prohibition was expressly intended for the protection of the native "printers of cards and pictures" (and stuff-printers) against foreign (undoubtedly German) rivalry; and was based upon the alleged reason of the decay of the printing-trade at Venice brought about by the introduction from abroad of great quantities of playing-cards, and of coloured and printed pictures.[1]

[1] The preamble of the decree runs as follows: Conciosia che l'arte, et mestier delle carte, e figure stampide, che se fano in Venesia e vegnudo a total Deffaction e questo sia per la gran quantita de carte da zugar, e fegure depente stampide, le qual vien fate de fuora de Venetia . . . etc. — Bottari, Lettere sulla Pittura etc. V, p. 485.



Fragment of an early Venetian woodcut.
Original in the R. Print-room Berlin.
Reduced facsimile.

We hear nothing of any printers or manufacturers throughout the rest of Italy, whose trade was akin to that of the German *Briefdrucker*. That there was absolutely nothing of the kind, it would, however, be too much to assume. It is only through the survival of works dating from the close of the fifteenth century, that we become aware of the existence at that time of printing-offices engaged in the production of woodcuts; such as the atelier of Zoan Andrea Vavassore at Venice and that of Bartolomeo Merlo at Verona.

It was the practice, in Italy no less than in Germany and in the Low Countries, to colour the single-leaf woodcuts which furnished the people with familiar pictures of the Virgin and the Saints. The brush-work was a mere daubing, chiefly of red and blue, on the more ordinary sort of those prints; but there are, particularly in the collection of the Berlin Cabinet, some examples of a superior style of colouring, used evidently for a better class of purchasers. In these, the costumes of the figures were painted in deep and vivid colours, the predominant hue being a red, made brilliant by an admixture of gum; while the heads and flesh-portions were more delicately, but no less opaquely, tinted. In some rare instances, the appearance of a genuine picture was realised, and it would seem as though the aim had been to produce the effect of a true, if somewhat coarse, fresco-painting. This inference harmonises with what has already been said as to the custom of decorating the walls of rooms with woodcuts.

That such was the main purpose to which Italian single-leaf woodcuts were intended to be applied, is probably the reason of their prevalent great size; the usual dimension being that of a large folio sheet. In Germany, the ordinary shape of most of the popular woodcuts was small folio, or quarto, or even less: but these sizes seem to have been rarely used in Italy, where, even at the earliest dates, compositions were not unknown which covered the surface of several united sheets of paper. In the sixteenth century, the grandiose conceptions of the former time were still maintained by the Italian wood-engravers, but new and different means, and a more developed method, were employed to produce the same breadth of effect.

As no single-leaf woodcut of primitive character has hitherto been discovered, bearing any indication of the time and place of its execution, we lack the necessary basis of fact on which to construct a classification of the existing specimens. Nothing but conjecture on the subject is left us. The character of several of those early Italian woodcuts confirms the opinion, founded on the prohibitive decree of 1441, that Venice was already, in the fifteenth century, a chief manufacturing centre of the trade in popular pictures. The Venetian type predominates distinctly in the majority of surviving examples.

The Berlin Print-room possesses several specimens of those popular Italian woodcuts, extremely simple in their mode of execution, and, to all appearance, productions of an early date. The fragment of a Madonna, surrounded by Saints, betrays the Venetian-Gothic style in the architectural forms of the niche and its border. The design is cut in strong and heavy lines. Of similar character, and bearing a resemblance to the more primitive German wood-engravings in the manner in which the block was cut, is a print destined for the use of the pilgrims to the shrine of Loretto, and bearing a xylographic inscription of several lines, — which was, in 1884, in the hands of Arrigoni at Milan.[1]

There is a curious blending of elements in a woodcut of the *Madonna and Child* (more than half life-size) now in the Berlin Print-room. The conception and the mode of treatment are Germanic, while the artistic style is North-Italian. It is either an imitation of German work; or else the blockcutter (and designer?) was a German settled in Italy.[2]

A purer Italian type, and a dexterous manipulation of the block, characterise another Madonna picture, similar to the preceding, but smaller, and only preserved in a fragmentary shape. It is coloured, and the painting of the Virgin's face, especially, is done with great care. — A reduced facsimile is given here.

[1] A reproduction was given in a description of the leaf published by the owner.

[2] We are unfortunately precluded from giving a facsimile of this interesting broadsheet, as the necessary reduction of size would have rendered it impossible to bring out the special characteristics of the engraving adequately.



The miracle of St. Martha.
Woodcut of the Milanese School in the collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild.
Reduced Facsimile.



THE MADONNA WITH THE INFANT SAVIOUR
FRAGMENT OF A WOODCUT IN THE ROYAL PRINTROOM AT BERLIN
SIZE OF THE ORIGINAL

In immediate natural succession to those two Madonnas of the Berlin Print-room, Mr. Mitchell's large *Madonna with Angels and Saints*, mentioned above, should take rank here. It is less delicate in the details of the engraving, but remarkable by reason of the rich composition, and the large dimensions of the work.

Sometimes the background of the picture is a mass of black, with a white pattern showing through it; upon which the coloured figures seem to stand out in bold relief. The effect is similar to that of the dotted or stippled prints, an imitation of which was perhaps intended. Of this kind is the *Madonna with two Angels*, a quarto leaf in the Berlin Print-room.

A small folio leaf, also in the Berlin collection, representing the *Crucifixion, with the Virgin and St. John*, is one of the rare pieces in which we can trace a clear relationship (in some degree) to a distinct school of Painting. The overstrained action of the figures in this woodcut, the forced and extravagant play of emotion in the features, were evidently derived from a composition by Carlo Crivelli, or one of the followers of that master.

One of the single woodcuts in the Berlin Print-room, is executed in the outline style familiar to us in the illustrated Venetian books which were printed between 1480 and 1490. It represents *St. John* standing amid the pillars of a temple, with the twelve Candlesticks of the Apocalypse displayed right and left of him.

Another *Madonna* in the Berlin Print-room, — a fragment of an engraver's proof taken off on the blank reverse of a piece of printed paper — seems to belong rather to the school of Padua or of Vicenza, although the manner in which the outline design is cut upon the block is quite Venetian. We give a facsimile of this woodcut in the size of the original. There is a second similar fragment in the same collection, but of more archaic appearance; which is, likewise, curiously enough, an engraver's proof.

Zoan Andrea Vavassore's workshop, of which we have already made repeated mention, seems to have developed its full activity in the pursuit of wood-engraving at Venice, about the year 1500; and to have carried on, especially, a large manufacture of single-leaf woodcuts. Of the signed productions of that printing-office, few examples are known to us; but these are marked by pecu-

liarities sufficiently characteristic to enable us to recognise a considerable number of unsigned ones. In addition to the woodcuts bearing the signature of Vavassore, which have been mentioned on a former page of the present treatise, the Berlin Print-room possesses, along with a number of others evidently emanating from his atelier, a fragment of a *Last Supper*, of large folio size, and a series of woodcuts in narrow folio, representing Christ and the Apostles in single figures, 33 centimetres high. Even in these, the peculiar style of design, coarsely Mantegnesque, which distinguishes Vavassore, is strongly predominant; as well as his usual mode of cutting the block, with slanting parallel lines to indicate the shading.

There is, in the British Museum collection, a unique copy in perfect preservation, of a wood-print of the *Bucentoro* (the Venetian ducal galley). This interesting cut was produced in the Vavassore work-shop, and represents the gorgeous vessel moving along the waters of a narrow canal, surrounded by a crowd of gondolas. A large number of spectators appear on the banks. The Bucentoro itself occupies more than half the leaf (which is about 120 centimetres in length, and 50 in height). The block-cutter's work is rather coarse, but it is carefully executed.

In order to complete our sketch of the laborious activity of the Venetian wood-engravers, at that period, in the production of broadsheets and single prints, it is necessary here to refer the reader to the descriptions, already given in various parts of this dissertation, of such pieces as the woodcuts of Jacob of Strassburg, and the large view of Venice by Barbari-Walch.

There seems to have been, likewise, at Milan and among artists of the Milanese school, as already mentioned, a certain tendency to the production of single-leaf woodcuts. The number of such works was probably not small. Some of the extant pieces display a finished excellence, which proves that the designers were perfectly acquainted with the technical conditions of their art, and that the block cutters were amply trained to reproduce the drawings correctly.

A large folio leaf, in the collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild at Paris, exhibits an immediate relationship to the woodcut



Ecce Homo.
Woodcut, Milanese School, XV Century.
Reduced facsimile.

illustrations in books printed by the brothers Le Signerre. It represents St. Martha sprinkling consecrated water over a dragon which, being thus rendered helpless, is easily dispatched by a man with an axe. It is a woodcut of great technical power, executed in the style of the *Specchio* of 1498, and the *Tesauro* of 1499, resembling them in the peculiar combination of Milanese and Veronese characteristics. The rich and tasteful border reminds us, in its drawing and composition, of the similar decoration around the cut of St. Jerome which we described when mentioning the *De veritate contricionis*, printed by Le Signerre at Saluzzo in 1503; and of which we have given a facsimile. The groups of angels and spiritual beings, with the instruments of the Passion, which occupy the upper and lower margins of the St. Martha woodcut are free copies of those in the border of the *Sitting Madonna*, by Benedetto Montagna and Jacob of Strassburg, described on a former page.

The Berlin Print-room possesses some woodcuts of the elder Milanese school, of special importance for the consideration of the group which we are now reviewing. One of those cuts, a large folio leaf, represents the half figure of the Saviour, of nearly life-size. He is bearing the cross, with His head bowed down, and an expression of pain upon His face, which is turned to the left. The figure is drawn with extreme simplicity, with but a few strokes, in firm sharp lines. It is hardly more than an outline design, with the merest possible touch of inner shading. Only the hair of the head, and the wood of the cross, exhibit much indication of detail, thereby forming a strong contrast to the rest of the picture. We are reminded of the characteristic qualities of Andrea Solario's work, by the clear-cut drawing of the face, which has perhaps an excessive sharpness of line, resembling copper-plate engraving. If we had fuller knowledge of the relations subsisting at that time between artists and block-cutters, and of the precise manner in which the division of their compound labour was arranged, we should be enabled to classify more correctly such woodcuts as this. As it is, the question here as elsewhere must be left unsolved, whether we have to do with a woodcut by the master himself (— in this instance probably Andrea Solario —) that is, with one for which he drew the design

upon the block, and prepared it completely for the knife of the journeyman; or whether the cut is to be considered as the technical reproduction by a wood-engraver of a drawing not originally intended as a model for engraving.

A pendant to the above print is found in a half figure *Ecce Homo*, of which there are, in the Berlin Print-room and in the Hamburg Museum, late impressions, taken evidently from the block when it was already in a worn and damaged state. The cut is of about the same dimensions as the *Christ bearing the Cross*, and shews the figure of the Saviour as seen in full face, the mouth distorted with agony, the teeth visible, and the reed in His fettered hands. The Sun and Moon appear above His head. According to the manner of conception and of drawing, as well as from the technical method of the engraving, this leaf must undoubtedly be assigned to the same artist, and the same workshop, as the *Christ bearing the Cross*.

Amongst the fifteenth-century woodcuts of the Milanese school, there is, in the Berlin collection, a very remarkable portrait of a beardless man. The fine head, round and ample in its forms, is turned in full profile towards the left, while from under the small tight toque that he wears, long tresses of hair stream out in rich profusion. The design of the contour is executed in white upon a black ground. At first sight, this woodcut (which we reproduce in a full-size photographic facsimile) resembles a drawing washed in sepia. The hair, as well as the inner shading of the head and face, is delicately worked in a faint blackish tint, which serves to render complete the illusion that we have a free-hand drawing, and not a woodcut, before us. A careful investigation with a powerful microscope has given us assurance, that in those parts, as well as in the rest of the picture, the pigment is nothing more than the ordinary printers' ink, rolled on in the usual manner, and worked into the paper by the press. The contours of the head and face, with their soft and swelling lines, so true to life, were cut upon the block with incomparable freedom and delicacy. Not inferior in exquisite taste and skill is the work of the printer who produced an impression so clear and sharp. The greyish tones of the inner shading were printed from



ITALIAN WOODCUT, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

ORIGINAL IN THE BERLIN ROYAL PRINT-ROOM



Christ carrying the Cross.
Woodcut, Milanese School, XV Century.
Reduced facsimile.

the same block as the deep blackness of the background, and at the same time; not in the *chiaroscuro* method of a double process, with two blocks. The artist probably obtained the effect to which we have alluded, by a peculiar treatment of the block; lowering the more prominent parts, scraping and roughening others, so as to soften the impression of the ink upon the paper, and make it seem like a washing in half-tints. The whole work has the appearance of an experiment, performed in order to test the possibility of reproducing, by a woodcut, the characteristics of a tinted drawing; in which, if such was indeed the object, the artist achieved a marvellous and inimitable success. The process was not, however, capable of serving for more than a few impressions, and must soon have been abandoned as unfitted for practical purposes. In our facsimile, the technical qualities of the woodcut are to be rather divined than observed; particularly as the flaws in the paper are exaggerated by the photographic process, and, in the result, blend annoyingly with the details of the design. — There is no signature or monogram to indicate the author of this rare piece, which, in its way, is unique. We are reminded of Andrea Solario by the masterly precision of the contour-drawing, and the soft expression of the features. The possibility that this woodcut was an artistic essay of that master, seems all the likelier from the fact that the two woodcuts already mentioned as of the Milanese school, are suggestive of Solario's style.

A workshop for prints and woodcuts, similar to that of Zoan Andrea Vavassore, was in active operation about the beginning of the sixteenth century, and used as its mark the initials I. B. with the figure of a bird.

This mark, which appears upon a series of copper and wood engravings, is interpreted by Zani as the signature of Giovanni Battista del Porto, presumably a Modenese artist.[1] He promised to give the grounds of his conclusion, in the third volume of his great work; but that volume never came into existence, and we remain unacquainted equally with the material upon which he

[1] Materiali etc., p. 134.

meant to base his assertion, and the process of reasoning which led him to adopt such a reading. It may indeed have been nothing more than the assumption of a probability, for his words do not carry any consciousness of certitude. Giovanni Battista del Porto is mentioned by Vendriani [1] as "a world-renowned copper-engraver, who transmitted his fame to posterity through a great number of works", and the writer ends by saying that "all this is taken from Lancilotto in his Chronicles". In Tommasino Lancilotto's Chronicle, however, there is nothing but a scanty mention of the family of the Porti, three of its members being cited as distinguished goldsmiths, while there is no allusion at all to our Giovan Battista. The meaning of the monogram in question remains therefore quite problematic.

However the case may stand, with regard to his name and place of abode, we are sufficiently assured, from his works, of the particular rank to be assigned to the artist whose monogram was "I. B." The fourteen copper-engravings from his hand, of which we have certain knowledge, are by no means uniform in their execution. Generally speaking, he handled the graver with tolerable skill, approximating rather to the German, than to the Italian, technical method; and had evidently been trained in the study of Dürer's early engravings. His works are not marked by any qualities of the finer sort, and his compositions look as though they were, in the main, borrowed from others. His subjects were chiefly mythological and classical, with backgrounds somewhat in Dürer's manner, and details adopted from the prints of that artist. The period to which we must refer the labours of I. B. is marked by one of his plates, representing a monstrous birth of twins which took place at Rome in 1503.

The eight woodcuts which bear the same mark, of I. B. with the bird, resemble collectively the set of copper-prints. There is one in the Berlin Print-room, a single leaf of narrow small folio size, which should be grouped with those which Galichon and Passavant have described. It represents Apollo and Daphne, and,

[1] Raccolta de Pittori Modenesi etc. p. 45. — See Galichon, in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, IV, p. 265, where a catalogue is given of the artist's works on copper and wood.



St. Jerome.
Woodcut attributed to Giovanni Battista del Porto.
(A section from the left side of the design).

although it bears no signature, exhibits such a likeness to some of the cuts on which the I. B. appears, that we cannot hesitate to include it among his works. A particularly close affinity is observable between this unmarked leaf, and the *Vulcan forging the arms of Æneas* (Galichon, 8).

In the woodcuts of the master I. B. there is even less uniformity of character than in the prints. There are wide diversities among them, not only in the style of drawing, but in the method of cutting the blocks.

One group of those cuts is distinguished by the delicate and careful treatment of the latest period of Quattrocento art; with the sharply accentuated drawing, and the simple mode of shading with parallel strokes, which we have remarked in other works of that time.

The best example of the group is a woodcut of *St. Jerome in the wilderness* (Galichon, 3). The excessive emaciation of the saint's figure, and the richness of the landscape around him, remind us, to some extent, of the copper-print by Benedetto Montagna, in which the same subject is treated. The second mark which appears on the woodcut, a little to the right of the "I. B.", and which seems to be a monogram combined of "A" and "M", is only found in a single other instance on work from I. B.'s hand; — namely, on the woodcut of *the Three Graces* (Galichon, 6).

The figure of the youthful David (Galichon, 1) is charming, though severe, with a Florentine gracefulness of attitude. The whole of this composition betrays a mixture of the Veronese manner and of other elements, the artistic origin of which can hardly be determined. The engraver's work shows more breadth of execution than in the *St. Jerome,* but without any loss of vigour and decision. Similar qualities mark the woodcut of *The Three Graces* (Galichon, 6).

Of the *Meleager and Atalanta* (Galichon, 7) it may be assumed that the design was based upon a composition by some artist of the school of Soddoma. This is the largest of all the I. B. woodcuts, broadly and coarsely but very effectively, rendered on the block. The *Transformation of Actæon* (Galichon, 4) is of similar kind. In the *Crucifixion* (Galichon, 2), a design crowded with

figures, we observe a totally different character of work, which distinguishes it from all the cuts described above. It is composed of Venetian and Mantegnesque motifs, and is drawn for the most part in pure outline. The last to be mentioned is the *Vulcan forging the arms of Æneas* (Galichon, 8) in which the design is weak, and of the late-Florentine style; while the technical execution is mean and undecided, betraying the hand of a mere journeyman.

So great is the variety of style and technique, in the different woodcuts of the so-called Battista del Porto, that it is impossible to consider them all as having emanated from the same hand, or as being works of a single artist. A man capable of producing them all, and endowed, to such an unexampled degree, with the power of changing his manner, and of working now in one style, and now in another, at will, would have been, for his time, a prodigy indeed. We are inclined rather to believe that the mark of I. B. with the bird, was used by an atelier in which both kinds of engraving were practised; that this workshop was situated in Mantua, and that it may perhaps have been directed by a man named Giovanni Battista del Porto. In that way, as it seems to us, a satisfactory explanation will be found for this and many similar phenomena in the history of old Italian Copper and Wood-engraving.

The close of the fifteenth century marks a distinct epoch in the history of Italian art. It is in no conventional way, but in strict accordance with realities, that we speak of the Quattrocento and the Cinquecento as two several periods in Art-history. Each of them has its own special characteristics, and the transition from one to the other synchronises almost exactly with the change of the century. The cycle which began with the year 1501, brought in its immediate train a thorough alteration of style, and introduced a new element into Italian wood-engraving. We have had occasion, in the course of our present essay, to glance sometimes beyond the limit of the fifteenth century, for the purpose of noticing works which, by their style and origin, belonged rather to that century than to the sixteenth, although dated in the latter. It is however undeniable that the woodcuts of the fifteenth century form an artistic group by themselves, and should be treated as a distinct

phase in the history of Art. Their characteristics are, decision and sharpness in the design, delicacy in the execution; in short, the style of treatment which produced, within narrow limits, and as book-illustrations, those graceful and attractive pictures which we have endeavoured to describe.

In the sixteenth century, the artistic significance of the wood-cuts used for book-adornment, ceased to exist, or else retired into the back-ground. Students of chiaroscuro, and pupils of the school of Titian, appropriated the art to themselves, and practised it on a plan of large pictorial treatment, with broad and striking effects. In its new phase, it seems to have become completely sundered from the older fashion which we have striven to review. Venice continued to retain her foremost place as the chief seat of its cultivation, until, towards the close of the seventeenth century, Wood-engraving lost all its claim to rank as one of the arts of design.



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